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# The Interpreters of Foreign Languages Among the Ancients

A Study Based on Greek and Latin Sources

BY

HENRY SNYDER GEHMAN, A. M.

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A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF PENNSYLVANIA, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.



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1914





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## PREFACE

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The following dissertation on Interpreters was suggested by Professor Rolfe's article "Did Liscus Speak Latin?" published in the *Classical Journal*, Vol. VII, pp. 126 sqq. It is a subject on which the handbooks and lexicons furnish very little information. The present investigation has been based on the Greek and Latin authors from the earliest times to Ammianus Marcellinus.

The collection of the various incidents resulted in an array of examples of the most diverse nature, many of which have absolutely no relation to one another. To establish order out of chaos has proved to be a very difficult task, especially since it seems impossible to find a scheme of classification which is at the same time both logical and consistent. Some of the divisions naturally shade into one another and some of the examples could equally well be put under various headings. In such instances, the author has followed what appeared to him to be the most practical arrangement. Thus Chapters III and IV have much in common and might very properly be blended. But since Chapter III refers especially to polyglots, the acquisition of foreign languages, and the profession in general, it seemed better to make two chapters instead of one.

The classification of the examples has been based primarily on the languages interpreted, and under the various linguistic headings a chronological order has been followed so far as possible. Fictitious incidents have been introduced before historical ones, but strict chronology could not always be followed; sometimes it has been sacrificed for the sake of observing the linguistic attainments of a certain individual, or in other instances it has seemed better to treat together several incidents that took place in the same district. In Chapter VI, miscel-

laneous barbarian languages are taken up before proceeding to Thracian, a barbarian language of Europe. Again, the incidents narrated in Chapter IX might logically be treated under Chapters VII and VIII; but it seemed more useful to treat Roman executive and judicial administration by itself, to limit it to senatorial and provincial affairs, and to exclude diplomatic business. Although the general classification is primarily linguistic, a deviation appeared more practical in this case. In Chapter VIII it happened that an arrangement according to language did not interfere with the chronology.

The treatment of various episodes may not seem consistent. Some have been expanded to greater length than others on account of their human interest, with the hope that the dissertation may thus be made more attractive to the reader.

Grateful acknowledgement for helpful suggestions, kindly criticism, and careful proof-reading is due to Professors J. C. Rolfe and W. B. McDaniel and Assistant Professors R. G. Kent and G. D. Hadzsits of the University of Pennsylvania.

H. S. G.

## CONTENTS

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Bibliography.....	7
I. Difficulties Occasioned by a Difference of Language.....	9
II. The Use of Signs and Gestures.....	13
III. The Institution of Interpreters.....	16
IV. General References to Interpreters.....	20
V. Interpreters of one Barbarian Language into Another.....	23
VI. Interpreters of Greek and Barbarian Languages..	30
1. Greek and Egyptian.....	30
2. Greek and Semitic.....	30
3. Greek and Indian.....	33
4. Greek and Persian.....	35
5. Greek and Miscellaneous Barbarian Languages.....	43
6. Greek and Thracian.....	44
VII. Interpreters of Latin and Greek.....	47
VIII. Interpreters of Latin and Barbarian Languages..	49
IX. Interpreters in Roman Executive and Judicial Administration.....	54
X. Interpreters of a Barbarian Language and one or the other of the Classical Languages.....	59
XI. Failure of Writers to Consider Differences of Language.....	61
XII. Conclusion.....	63







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Biblical quotations are according to the American Revised Version of 1901, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York.





## CHAPTER I

### DIFFICULTIES OCCASIONED BY A DIFFERENCE OF LANGUAGE

According to the account in the Old Testament, the whole earth was originally of one speech; and as the children of men had built a city and a tower in a plain in the land of Shinar, Jehovah said (*Gen.* XI): "6. Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do. 7. Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. 8. So Jehovah scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off building the city. 9. Therefore was the name of it called Babel; because Jehovah did there confound the language of all the earth." Thus the ancient Hebrews explain the origin of the divers tongues, an account which is accepted also by Josephus.<sup>1</sup>

Pliny,<sup>2</sup> realizing the importance of linguistic differences, says that the existence of so many languages among the various nations, so many modes of speech, so great a variety of expressions, is a trifling thing apparently, but really of incalculable importance; for to another, a man who is of a different country is almost the same as no man at all. Similarly Cicero,<sup>3</sup> in speaking of the Roman Epicureans who did not understand Greek and of the Greeks who did not understand Latin, says that they are reciprocally deaf as to each other's language. This principle, he says, applies to other tongues also; and so he makes the general statement, that we are truly deaf with regard to the innumerable languages which we do not understand.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph. *Antiq. Jud.* I, 4, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Plin. *N. H.* VII, 1, 1, §7.

<sup>3</sup> Cic. *Tusc.* V, 40, 116.

Again referring to the barrier offered by foreign languages, in 1 *Cor.* XIV, St. Paul says that one does not understand the man who speaks an unknown tongue.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, he makes the following interesting comparison; "7. Even things without life, giving a voice, whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? 8. For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war? 9. So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? 11. If then I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian,<sup>5</sup> and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me." In order to avoid such difficulties, he advises that if any one speak in a tongue, one shall interpret, while two, or at the most three, speak in turn. But if there be no interpreter, he commands them to remain silent in the church.

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<sup>4</sup> In this chapter St. Paul discourses on speaking in *tongues*, i. e., unknown languages under divine inspiration. In this connexion, compare the tongues on the day of Pentecost, *Acts* II, 1-11: "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. 2. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. 4. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5. Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6. And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. 7. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, Behold, are not all these that speak Galilaeans? 8. And how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born? 9. Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judaea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, 10. in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11. Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ovid's experience at Tomi, *Trist.* V, 10, 37 sqq.:

"Barbarus hic ego sum, qui non intellegor ulli,  
Et rident stolidi verba Latina Getae;  
Meque palam de me tuto male saepe loquuntur  
Forsitan obiciunt exsiliumque mihi,  
Utque fit, in me aliquid, si quid dicentibus illis  
Abnuerim quotiens adnuerimque, putant."



The Romans wondered where Numa Pompilius received his legal and religious training. Some wrongly assumed that he studied under Pythagoras, but according to Roman tradition, the latter lived more than a hundred years later in the reign of Servius Tullius. Livy<sup>6</sup> says that the tradition must be wrong even though the two had been contemporaries; "for in what common language could they have communicated, or with what safety could one man have made his way through so many nations, differing in language and manners?"<sup>7</sup> In the face of such difficulties, he believed rather that Numa's mind was by nature virtuously endowed and that the instruction which he received was not so much in foreign learning as through the rough and strict discipline of the Sabines, who were as uncorrupted as any race of men.

Xenophon<sup>8</sup> also gives us an example of the difficulty which men of different languages have in understanding one another. Socrates asked Hippias, "Can you then assert of these unwritten laws that man made them?" "Nay, how could that be;" answered Hippias, "for how could they all have come together? And even if they had done so, men are not all of one speech." He means that there would have been a babel of tongues.

Differences of language, it appears, have proved to be serious obstacles in the way of international relations. Sallust,<sup>9</sup> in mentioning the Persians who settled in Africa, observes that they used the inverted hulls of ships as huts, since they had no timber in their own fields. He also asserts that they could not obtain any timber from the Spaniards, because the great sea and an unknown speech prevented commercial relations. However, the language could not have been the more serious obstacle, since we shall later see that commerce could be transacted without the use of speech.

On account of the difference of language, the vanquished in battle sometimes failed to make themselves understood. Thus

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<sup>6</sup> Liv. I, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Yet Livy in I, 1 does not call our attention to the difference of language between Aeneas and Latinus.

<sup>8</sup> Xen. *Mem.* IV, 4, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Sall. *Iug.* 18.

## 12 *The Interpreters of Foreign Languages Among the Ancients*

when Sulla<sup>10</sup> in the Mithridatic war, in the year 86 B. C., was fighting against Archelaus, the flight and slaughter of the barbarians followed. Some were driven into a neighboring lake, and not knowing how to swim, perished while begging for mercy in their own vernacular, which was not understood by the Romans.

For one of the best examples of an army that spoke many languages, with the attendant difficulties, we may take the Carthaginian forces. The diversity of tongues assumed great importance during the revolt of the mercenaries and at the battle of Zama. However, since polyglottous officers acted as interpreters, the narration of those incidents has been reserved for a later chapter.

The foregoing examples suffice to show the inconvenience that was occasioned by the differences of language, and make us realize that interpreters were a necessary institution. In fact, St. Paul expressly states the need for them. So does Aeschylus<sup>11</sup> in a particular instance, when Cassandra does not understand Clytemnestra and the chorus observes that the foreign woman seems to need a skillful interpreter. Men of different tongues in a concourse cannot work in harmony, and the man confronted by an unknown tongue simply hears a conglomeration of sounds which are entirely meaningless.

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<sup>10</sup> Appian, *De Bello Mith.* 50.

<sup>11</sup> Aesch. *Agam.* 1046-7 (Wecklein, *Aeschyli Fabulae*, Berlin, 1885).



## CHAPTER II

### THE USE OF SIGNS AND GESTURES

"There was speech in their dumbness,  
language in their very gesture."—Shak. *The Winter's Tale*, V, 2.

Now the difficulty of communicating with foreigners may, by means of signs or gestures, be overcome without a knowledge of their language. According to Quintilian<sup>12</sup>, gestures are a universal means of conversation. They are often, however, wholly conventional, and just as hard to understand by the untutored as a new language itself. Pointing to the mouth very evidently indicates hunger, but all gestures are not of this sort. Modern Italians use a marvelous system, in which certain movements seem to be quite arbitrary.

The signs and gestures of supplication are very simple. Thus Lucan<sup>13</sup> says that Pompey should use tears in addressing the Oriental. Turning from poetry to prose, we read<sup>14</sup> that in the year 52 B. C., Vercingetorix appeared before Caesar to ask for pardon; he came in without any announcement by herald, and on account of his sudden appearance, alarmed some that were present. When quiet had been restored, he uttered not a word, but fell upon his knees and remained so with clasped hands.

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<sup>12</sup> Quint. *Inst.* XI, 3, 85-7: "Nam ceterae partes loquentem adiuvant, hae (manus), prope est ut dicam, ipsae loquuntur. An non his poscimus, pollicemur, vocamus, dimittimus, minamur, supplicamus, abominamur, timemus, interrogamus, negamus? Gaudium, tristitiam, dubitationem, confessionem, paenitentiam, modum, copiam, numerum, tempus ostendimus? Non eadem concitant, inhihent, supplicant, probant, admirantur, verecundantur? Non in demonstrandis locis atque personis adverbiorum atque pronominum obtinent vicem? Ut in tanta per omnis gentes nationesque linguae diversitate hic mihi omnium hominum communis sermo videatur."

<sup>13</sup> Lucan, *Phars.* VIII, 348-9: "Exiget ignorans Latiae commercia linguae | Ut lacrimis se, Magne, roges."

<sup>14</sup> Cassius Dio, XL, 41.

## 14 *The Interpreters of Foreign Languages Among the Ancients*

Since gestures are a universal means of conversation, more complicated ideas may be expressed by them. Once upon a time during their invasion of Scythia, the Amazons were encamped near an army of Scythian youths. Herodotus<sup>15</sup> in narrating the incident tells us that they did not understand each other's language. When some incident brought a youth and an Amazon together, the man easily gained the good graces of the woman, communicating by means of signs. Aeschylus<sup>16</sup> also refers to the use of gestures. When Clytemnestra was taunting the captive Cassandra and received no reply, she told her that, if she did not understand her, she should use her barbarian<sup>17</sup> hand instead of her voice. The tragedian inconsistently assumes that the Trojan maid was able to comprehend what Clytemnestra said without being able to express herself in the language.

The effective use of gestures depends upon the temperament of the individual. Thus to-day the vivacious southern European has a command over them that is altogether unattainable by the more phlegmatic Teuton. In fact, a rather wide and complicated range of ideas may be so expressed. For example, we are told by Lucian<sup>18</sup> of a certain man from the barbarians of Pontus, a semi-Graecus of royal rank, who was at the court of Nero on official business. There he beheld a remarkable pantomimic dancer, whose actions were so expressive that he understood everything, although he could not follow the words which were sung. When the ambassador prepared to leave, Nero promised to give him whatever he desired. He asked for the dancer, because he ruled barbarians of different languages, and since it was difficult to obtain interpreters for his people, the dancer by his movements might make known the king's wishes to his subjects, whatever their language.

Commerce may be transacted even without the use of gestures. Herodotus<sup>19</sup> tells us that the Carthaginians carried on a dumb

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<sup>15</sup> Hdt. IV, 111; 113.

<sup>16</sup> Aesch. *Agam.* 1045.

<sup>17</sup> Aeschylus, not considering the Trojans to be Greeks, calls them barbarians.

<sup>18</sup> Lucian, *De Sal.* 64.

<sup>19</sup> Hdt. IV, 196.



commerce in Western Africa beyond the Pillars of Hercules. When the Carthaginians came to these people, they took out their cargo, and having arranged it on the shore, went back to their boats and raised a smoke. On seeing this the natives came to the sea and laid some gold opposite the wares and then withdrew. Then the Carthaginians landed again, and if the gold appeared to them sufficient for the goods, they took it up and departed. But if it was not enough, they went back to their boats. Again the natives came forth and added gold until they satisfied the traders. It is said that no one cheated. The traders did not take the precious metal until it seemed to them to compensate for the value of the goods, nor did the natives seize the goods before the traders took the gold. In a similar instance, Pliny<sup>20</sup> asserts that the Seres had no language of their own, but simply made an uncouth sort of noise by way of talking. But apparently this presented no obstacle to trade. The merchandise for sale was left by merchants on the bank of a river, and it was then removed by the natives if they thought proper to make an exchange of goods.

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<sup>20</sup> Plin. *N. H.* VI, 22, 24, §88.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE INSTITUTION OF INTERPRETERS

Even if certain linguistic differences, as we have seen, may be overcome by the use of gestures, the ideas thus expressed are naturally limited. If men who do not understand each other's language wish to hold a parley on a subject which cannot be expressed by gestures, the only resource left is an interpreter, or even a series of interpreters. The use of them must have been very general, since references to interpreters are found in the Greek and Latin literature of all periods.

We hear of remarkable historical characters, who spoke many languages with great ease, and so did not need any intermediaries. Most conspicuous of these is Mithridates the Great, of whom Pliny<sup>21</sup> says that he knew twenty-two languages. Again in *N. H.* VII, 24, 24, §88, he states that, as king over twenty-two races, Mithridates pronounced justice in as many tongues. Valerius Maximus<sup>22</sup> informs us of the same attainment. Aulus Gellius<sup>23</sup> increases to twenty-five the number of languages which the king spoke fluently. A later writer,<sup>24</sup> not content with these low figures, ascribes to him a knowledge of fifty tongues.

A polyglot of the other sex is Cleopatra, who according to Plutarch<sup>25</sup> spoke most languages and answered most of the

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<sup>21</sup> Plin. *N. H.* XXV, 2, 3, §6: "illum solum mortalium viginti duabus linguis locutum certum est."

<sup>22</sup> Val. Max. VIII, 7, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Gell. XVII, 17: "quinque et viginti gentium, quas sub dicione habuit, linguas percalluit earumque omnium gentium viris haut umquam per interpretem conlocutus est, sed ut quemque ab eo appellari usus fuit, proinde lingua et oratione ipsius non minus scite, quam si gentilis eius esset, locutus est."

<sup>24</sup> Ps. Aur. Vict. *Vir. ill.* LXXVI, I.

<sup>25</sup> Plut. *Anton.* 27.

foreign ambassadors in their own vernacular. He maintains that she gave audience herself to the Ethiopians, the Troglodytes, the Hebrews, the Arabs, the Syrians, the Medes, and the Parthians. Nor were these all the languages that she understood, though the kings of Egypt who preceded her could hardly ever acquire a knowledge of Egyptian, and some of them forgot even their original Macedonian.

Besides these two remarkable polyglots, we read of men of smaller attainments; but usually in mentioning bilinguists or polyglots the authors state the fact without assigning the reason for the acquisition of the languages.

We may suppose that some interpreters had parents of different nationalities. For example, a man who was bilingual<sup>26</sup>—that is, he knew Greek and Persian—having a Lycian father and a Persian mother, offered himself as a guide to Alexander on the latter's entrance into Persia. Furthermore, Herodotus<sup>27</sup> narrates that Scylas, son of the Scythian king Ariapithes, was the child, not of a native Scythian, but of a woman of Istria, from whom he gained an acquaintance with the Greek language and letters. Without doubt Scylas knew Scythian too, although the mention of him here does not, of course, mean that he ever served as a professional interpreter.

As linguists were in demand in international, diplomatic, and commercial affairs, a man so fortunate as to be a polyglot might be tempted to enter such a field in preference to spending his time in learning a trade or profession. Also, a polyglot who was not a professional interpreter might, by his accidental presence on an occasion where an interpreter was demanded, perform duties as such.

But no doubt some men studied languages for the express purpose of acting as interpreters; or even if their original intention was not to serve in that capacity, later developments may have induced them to enter that field. Alexander<sup>28</sup> se-

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<sup>26</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 37. Since his father was a Lycian, no doubt he spoke Lycian also; but Greek and Persian were the languages he needed in his services and so were vividly in the writer's mind. For this reason, Plutarch ignores his knowledge of Lycian and does not call him trilingual.

<sup>27</sup> Hdt. IV, 78.

<sup>28</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 47, 3.



## 18 *The Interpreters of Foreign Languages Among the Ancients*

lected thirty thousand Persian boys and furnished masters to instruct them in the Greek tongue. From the various nations of Spain, Sertorius<sup>29</sup> collected the children of the nobility into the city of Osca and appointed masters to teach them the Greek and Roman learning. The spread of the Macedonian and Roman arms was followed by the study of the Greek and Latin languages, not only for cultural purposes, but quite naturally also for practical ends. Thus the native of a conquered province, who knew either speech, could act as interpreter between his compatriots and the conquerors.

Probably very few men become expert polyglots by deliberately studying languages, although we are told that Themistocles devoted himself to a study of Persian with a definite purpose. In his day there were no grammars, lexicons, and chrestomathies, and a man who wished to study a foreign language had many disadvantages not existing in our day. The most natural way of acquiring a foreign speech was to live in a district where several tongues were spoken and where their acquisition was a necessity and was accomplished without any conscious effort. In a cosmopolitan city or in a region inhabited by several nationalities, the children by associating with each other acquire various languages with great facility. A man thus favored was Quintus Ennius<sup>30</sup>, who was born near Rudiae in Calabria and said that he had three hearts, because he could speak Greek, Oscan, and Latin.

It seems very probable that most interpreters came from the lower classes. In many cases they were freedmen or slaves, and the language which they interpreted, especially into Greek and Latin, was their own vernacular.<sup>31</sup> In traveling either as a tourist or as a man of fortune, a person would acquire a good many languages as a matter of necessity, provided that he stayed long enough in one place. The poet Ovid in his exile

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<sup>29</sup> Plut. *Sertorius* 14, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Gell. XVII, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the Macronian who had been a slave at Athens, Xen. *Anab.* IV, 8, 4.

learned to speak<sup>32</sup> Getic and Sarmatian, and actually wrote<sup>33</sup> in the former tongue. In conference with the remote barbarians, probably the most available interpreters were the merchants, the "lixae ac negotiatores, quos ius commercii, dein cupido augendi pecuniam, postremum oblivio patriae suis quemque ab sedibus hostilem in agrum transtulerat."<sup>34</sup>

For the definite mention of professionally trained linguists, we have to turn to Herodotus' account of Egypt. According to the historian<sup>35</sup> the people of that country were divided into seven classes: priests, warriors, cowherds, swineherds, tradesmen, interpreters, and boatmen. To the Ionians and Carians who had lent him their assistance, Psammetichus<sup>36</sup> assigned as abodes two places opposite to each other, one on either side of the Nile, which were called Στρατόπεδα. Further, he entrusted to their care certain Egyptian children, whom they were to teach Greek. These children, thus instructed, became the parents of the entire class of interpreters in Egypt.

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<sup>32</sup> Ov. *Trist.* V, 12, 58-59:

"Ipse mihi videor iam dedidicisse Latine;  
Nam didici Getice Sarmaticeque loqui."

Cf. Ov. *Pont.* III, 2, 40.

<sup>33</sup> Ov. *Pont.* IV, 13, 17 sqq.:

"Nec te mirari, si sint vitiosa, decebit  
Carmina, quae faciam paene poeta Getes.  
A! pudet, et Getico scripsi sermone libellum,  
Structaque sunt nostris barbara verba modis."

<sup>34</sup> Tac. *Ann.* II, 62.

<sup>35</sup> Hdt. II, 164.

<sup>36</sup> Hdt. II, 154.

## CHAPTER IV

### GENERAL REFERENCES TO INTERPRETERS

In reading the classics, we find that sometimes the authors refer to interpreters without implying a specific conference, or if a parley was held, they do not mention the languages interpreted. While the Ten Thousand Greeks were within the confines of the Persian Empire, they had frequent occasions to use interpreters, usually, we may suppose, to translate Persian or dialects of Persian into Greek. Xenophon<sup>37</sup> informs us that the *interpreter* of the Greeks (apparently when he was not performing his duties as such) said that he saw and recognized the brother of Tissaphernes with Ariaeus, Artabazus, and Mithridates. On account of the many languages<sup>38</sup> within the Persian Empire, the Great King must have needed linguistic experts continually. In narrating the conquests of Alexander, Quintus Curtius<sup>39</sup> mentions the capture of Melon, the interpreter of Darius.

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<sup>37</sup> Xen. *Anab.* II, 5, 35.

<sup>38</sup> See Xen. *Cyr.* I, 1, 4: "Κῦρος δὲ παραλαβὼν ὡσαύτως οὕτω καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ ἔθνη αὐτόνομα ὄντα ὁρμηθεὶς σὺν ὀλίγῃ Περσῶν στρατιᾷ ἐχόντων μὲν ἡγήσατο Μήδων, ἐχόντων δὲ Ὑρκανίων, κατεστρέψατο δὲ Σύρους, Ἀσσυρίους, Ἀραβίους, Καππαδόκας, Φρύγας ἀμφοτέρους, Λυδοὺς, Κᾶρας, Φοίνικας, Βαβυλωνίους, ἤρξε δὲ Βακτριῶν καὶ Ἰνδῶν καὶ Κιλικίων, ὡσαύτως δὲ Σακῶν καὶ Παφλαγόνων καὶ Μαριανδυνῶν καὶ ἄλλων δὲ παμπόλλων ἐθνῶν, ὧν οὐδ' ἂν τὰ ὀνόματα ἔχοι τις εἰπεῖν, ἐπῆρξε δὲ καὶ Ἑλλήνων τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, καταβάς δὲ ἐπὶ θάλατταν καὶ Κυπρίων καὶ Αἰγυπτίων. (5) Καὶ τοίνυν τῶν ἐθνῶν τούτων ἤρξεν οὔτε αὐτῷ ὁμογλώττων ὄντων οὔτε ἀλλήλοις." . . . Although this passage refers to an earlier period, we can hardly suppose that the Persian Empire was of homogeneous speech at the time of Alexander. Presumably Darius had other interpreters besides Melon (Curt. V, 13, 7). In what languages the latter was proficient, we do not know.

<sup>39</sup> Curt. V, 13, 7.



Interpreters,<sup>40</sup> it appears, were sometimes in the service of private persons. Cicero, *Ad fam.* XIII, 54 refers to one that he had in his own employ or household. He twice mentions<sup>41</sup> one named Valerius.

Interpreters of many languages, not specifically named, were used on one occasion by Sulla. Plutarch in his life of the Dictator<sup>42</sup> narrates the story that near Apollonia, in a sacred spot called the Nymphaeum, a satyr was taken asleep, looking exactly like those which sculptors and painters represented. When he was brought to Sulla, he was interrogated through many interpreters as to who he was, but he uttered hardly anything intelligible, his accent being harsh, something between the neighing of a horse and the bleating of a goat.

Interpreters were sometimes used by commanders in a spirit of haughtiness, where the occasion did not demand their use. Bolon,<sup>43</sup> the proud captain of Alexander, although he had been promoted from a humble station and was Macedonian by birth, did not blush with shame at hearing men of his own tongue through an interpreter. Hannibal<sup>44</sup> is said to have been so elated by his success at Cannae that he would not admit any of his fellow countrymen into camp nor give a reply to anyone except through an interpreter. It would appear that by interposing this barrier, the general felt that he removed to a greater distance the person addressing him.

Interpreters, although not indispensable, greatly facilitated commerce. Herodotus<sup>45</sup> says that some of the Scythians were accustomed to penetrate as far as the "Bald-Headed Men" and that the Greeks from the mart on the Borysthenes and from other trade centers along the Euxine went to the same

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<sup>40</sup> For a general reference to interpreters, cf. Cic. *Vatin.* 15, 35: "Et quoniam legationis tuae facta mentio est . . . Adeone tibi sordidum consilium visum est, adeo afflictus senatus, adeo misera et prostrata res publica, ut non nuntios pacis ac belli, non oratores, non *interpretes*, non bellici consilii auctores, non ministros muneris provincialis senatus more maiorum deligere posset?"

<sup>41</sup> Cic. *Ad Att.* I, 12, 2 and XVI, 11, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Plut. *Sulla* 27, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Curt. VI, 11, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Val. Max. IX, 5, Ext. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Hdt. IV, 24.

## 22 *The Interpreters of Foreign Languages Among the Ancients*

land. The Scythians, he says, who made this journey communicated with the inhabitants by means of seven linguists and seven languages.<sup>46</sup> According to Pliny<sup>47</sup> still more interpreters were required in trading at Dioscurias in Colchis, in his time deserted, but once such a famous city, that, according to Timosthenes, three hundred nations, all of different languages, were in the habit of resorting to it. In later times, the Romans had there one hundred and thirty interpreters for the purpose of transacting business.

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<sup>46</sup> It is impossible to judge what these were. Cf. Rawlinson, *Transl. of Hdt.* in a note to the above passage: "Herodotus probably intends the language of the Scythians, the Sauromatae, the Budini, the Geloni, the Thysagetae, the Iyrcae, and the Argippaeans. But it may be questioned whether the traders would have had to pass through all these tribes."

<sup>47</sup> Plin. *N. H.* VI, 5, 5, §15.

## CHAPTER V

### INTERPRETERS OF ONE BARBARIAN LANGUAGE INTO ANOTHER

If for our present purpose the term barbarian be understood to denote all languages except Greek and Latin, an early example in this category<sup>48</sup> takes us to Persia. Herodotus<sup>49</sup> informs us that Cyrus the Great had interpreters in his service. When Sardis was captured by the Persians, Croesus himself fell into their hands. A vast pyre had been raised by the orders of Cyrus; and Croesus, laden with fetters, was placed upon it, and with him fourteen sons of the Lydians. As he was on this funeral pile, it came into his mind that there was a divine warning in the words which had come to him from the lips of Solon, that no one can be pronounced happy before his death. Breaking his deep silence, he groaned aloud, thrice uttering the name of Solon. Cyrus caught the sounds and bade the interpreters inquire of Croesus upon whom he called. They drew near and asked him, but he held his peace and for a long time made no answer to their questionings, until at length, forced to say something, he exclaimed, "One I would give much to see conversing with every monarch." Not knowing what he meant by this reply, the interpreters begged him to explain himself; and as they pressed for an answer, he told them of the

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<sup>48</sup> The Old Testament narrative, *Gen.* XLII, 20 sqq., also shows that interpreters were regularly used to translate barbarian languages. The viceroy of Egypt, in conversing with the Semites from Canaan, employed one. When the sons of Jacob came to Egypt for corn, Joseph demanded that his brethren bring their youngest brother also to Egypt, saying, "So shall your words be verified and ye shall not die." Then they felt sorry that they had wronged their brother Joseph, while Reuben reminded them that it had been done against his advice. But they did not know that Joseph understood them; for he spoke unto them by an interpreter.

<sup>49</sup> Hdt. I, 86.



## 24 *The Interpreters of Foreign Languages Among the Ancients*

visit that Solon a long time before had paid him. In the meanwhile, the pyre had been lighted; but Cyrus on hearing from his linguists what Croesus had said, ordered the fire to be extinguished and Croesus to be taken down.

Not only did Cyrus have men to translate Lydian, but he had also, according to Xenophon,<sup>50</sup> those who knew Syrian.<sup>51</sup> When he attacked Babylon, he sent a body of horse up and down through the streets, bidding them kill those whom they found abroad. He also ordered some who knew Syrian, i.e. Aramaic, to proclaim to those that were in the houses to remain within, commanding that if any were caught outside, they should be killed. He also ordered heralds to make proclamation that the Babylonians should give up their arms, and that all the people in any house where arms were found, should suffer death.

It seems, however, that the Persian King did not have men who could speak the language of remote countries. Thus Cambyses,<sup>52</sup> wishing to make an expedition against the long-lived Ethiopians, who lived in that part of Libya which borders upon the Southern Sea, made up his mind to send spies there under pretense of carrying gifts to the king. So he sent to Elephantine for certain Ichthyophagi, who were acquainted with the Ethiopian tongue and accordingly rendered him their services.

One of the most important instances of the differences of language and the use of interpreters is found in the Carthaginian army. For this reason, the mutiny of the mercenaries is especially interesting for our purpose. Polybius<sup>53</sup> tells us that there were constant conferences hastily arranged, sometimes of separate nationalities, sometimes of the whole army; but since

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<sup>50</sup> Xen. *Cyr.* VII, 5, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Xenophon, it appears, does not mean Syrian, but Assyrian, as he occasionally uses Syrian for Assyrian. Cf. *Cyr.* V, 4, 51: εἰς τὰ μεθόρια τῶν Σύρων καὶ Μήδων, and VIII, 3, 24-25. Syrian or Assyrian, referring to the language of Babylon at this and later times, does not mean the Old Babylonian, but the Aramaic. This was already widely spread when the Persians became supreme in Asia, and in driving out other Semitic dialects, became a *lingua franca* in Asia Minor, Palestine and the Tigris-Euphrates valley.

<sup>52</sup> Hdt. III, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Polyb. I, 67.

there was no unity of race or language among them, the entire camp became a babel of confusion. As there were in the army<sup>54</sup> Iberians and Celts, men from Liguria and from the Balearic Islands and a not inconsiderable number of half-breed Greeks—mostly deserters and slaves—it was impossible to collect and address them *en masse* or to discover any other means for this purpose. For how was it to be done? The general could not possibly know their several languages, and to make a speech four or five times on the same subject through several interpreters was hardly feasible. As the only alternative, Hanno, who represented the Carthaginian government, constantly endeavored to address his entreaties and exhortations to the soldiers through their officers. But he had the same difficulty with them. Sometimes they failed to understand what he said; at other times they received his words with expressions of approval and yet made reports to the common soldiers in a contrary sense, some doing it through error, others through malice.<sup>55</sup> The result was a general condition of uncertainty, mistrust, and misunderstanding.

Polybius<sup>56</sup> goes on to say that, in order to restore discipline, Gesco, a representative of the government, held a meeting of the officers and then of the men according to their nationalities. He rebuked them for their past conduct and endeavored to show them their duty in the present. He certainly must have used interpreters in addressing the various nationalities, although Polybius does not mention them.

At length the mutineers in common learned the one word "throw." Spendius, a Campanian slave, and Mathos, a Libyan, delivered violent invectives against Gesco and the Carthaginians. Our historian does not inform us in what tongue they addressed

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<sup>54</sup> For the nationalities in the army of Hannibal, see Livy, XXIII, 5, 11 and Polybius, XI, 19.

<sup>55</sup> Ovid seems to have had a similar experience of being misinterpreted among the Getae. Cf. *Ov. Pont.* IV, 14, 39 sqq.:

"Falsa tamen passa est aequa convicia mente

Obfuit auctori nec fera lingua suo.

At malus interpres populi mihi concitat iram,

Inque novum crimen carmina nostra vocat.

Tam felix utinam, quam pectore candidus essem!

Exstat adhuc nemo saucius ore meo."

<sup>56</sup> Polyb. I, 69-70.

the soldiers, but in the eightieth chapter of the first book he tells us that, thanks to the length of previous service, Phoenician (meaning Punic) was the language which the greatest number of men understood best. Presumably Spendius and Mathos spoke Carthaginian, i. e., the Carthaginian of the camp, which was no doubt illiterate and vulgar, but readily acquired by many foreigners in the army. Probably they could appeal to a larger number of men by interspersing violent expressions in other languages with the Punic. They could easily have learned enough of these to catch the ear of the soldiers who did not understand Punic.<sup>57</sup> For this same reason, the violent speeches of these two men could probably be followed by a greater number of mercenaries than could the exhortations of Hanno and Gesco, entreating the soldiers to be patient. Spendius and Mathos also must have been very popular among the soldiery, and this would aid a great deal in keeping the soldiers in order while they delivered their invectives. Even if many mercenaries did not understand the words of these two men, they knew which side they represented, and by understanding a few proper names coupled with inciting gestures of the speakers, they were satisfied. On the other hand, it was necessary for Gesco to be thoroughly understood and so he addressed the officers and held assemblies of the soldiers according to nationalities. No one but Spendius and Mathos could get a hearing before the mutinous soldiers; whoever did attempt to speak, was promptly stoned to death, before the assembly had waited long enough to ascertain which party he intended to support. A considerable number of privates as well as officers were killed in this manner in the various tumults which took place; and from the constant repetition of this act of violence, the whole army learned the meaning of the word "*βάλλε*",<sup>58</sup> although

<sup>57</sup> How many men were present at these meetings, it is impossible to judge. It is highly improbable that one man stood up and spoke while the whole mutinous body listened attentively.

<sup>58</sup> We can hardly suppose that they used the Greek word, unless some half-breed Greeks happened to shout that word when the throwing began. In that case, it could have been caught by the other nationalities and gradually learned by the whole army. Since Punic was the language best known in the army, one would infer that the Punic word for "throw" was used, and that Polybius simply translates the expression. If a soldier whose language was neither Greek nor Punic shouted first, the word of his language would have become the common expression.



there was not another word which was intelligible to them all in common. The most usual occasion for this to happen was when they collected in crowds, flushed with wine after their midday meal. On such occasions, if some one started the cry "βάλλε", such volleys of stones were poured in from every side and with such rapidity, that it was impossible for any one to escape who once ventured to stand forward to address them. The result was that soon no one had the courage to offer them any counsel at all.

Although Spendius and Mathos were very popular, their colleague Autaritus, a general of the Gauls, also attained a very distinguished position among the mutinous soldiery. Polybius<sup>59</sup> tells us that he was the most effective speaker, because he could make himself understood by a large number of those present at a meeting. On account of the length of his service, he was able to speak Phoenician, the language to which, as we have already remarked above, the largest number of men could listen intelligently.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly his speech was received with acclamation and at the close of his address he received loud applause.

But when many of the several nationalities, being moved by Gesco's former acts of kindness, came forward at the same time and would have deprecated at least the infliction of torture, not a word of what they said was understood; partly because many were speaking at the same time, and partly because every one offered counsel in his native language. But when at length it was disclosed that their intention was to dissuade the infliction of torture, one of those present shouted "βάλλε." Then the mercenaries stoned to death all who had come forward to speak.

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<sup>59</sup> Polyb. I, 80.

<sup>60</sup> Polybius does not tell us anything about the speech Spendius and Mathos actually used, but in addressing the whole assembly, we can hardly suppose that they spoke any other language, at least for the main part of their harangues, than Punic. Probably they owed their success to other characteristics. Spendius was a man of great daring and physical strength, qualities which would be admired by a mob. Even if these two men were of poor linguistic attainments, the discontented soldiers would idolize them because they roused the spirit of revolt and abused the government. If Autaritus was the most effective speaker on account of linguistic ability, Spendius and Mathos probably made up for this deficiency by powerful and magnetic personalities.

The question of language in the Carthaginian army again confronts us at the battle of Zama. In describing that conflict, Livy<sup>61</sup> states that the Carthaginians used various methods of encouraging such a number of men, differing from one another in language, in manners, in laws, in garb, in temper, and in their motives for engaging in the service. Hannibal devoted his attention to the Carthaginians,<sup>62</sup> and the commanders of the several nations addressed their respective countrymen; but even many of these had to speak through interpreters on account of the admixture of foreigners.

The quotation from Polybius, in the footnote, clearly indicates, however, that Hannibal simply addressed his army of veterans. Presumably those of his soldiers who were not Carthaginians had acquired some knowledge of Punic during their long service. If the mutinous mercenaries had some acquaintance with Punic, it is just as reasonable to suppose that the army of Italy had a similar knowledge. Of course, their command of the language could not have been idiomatic, and was confined to the terse vocabulary of camp life and to military terms. Probably they could comprehend Hannibal's speech with a fair amount of intelligence, since he recounted their former successes in Italy. If they could not follow everything he said, the personality and presence of Hannibal himself was enough to infuse them with courage; for the most remarkable ability was required to make a homogeneous army out of so many diverse elements. In very many cases, the address of a commander to

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<sup>61</sup> Liv. XXX, 33; cf. also Liv. XXX, 34; Polyb. XV, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Livy does not differentiate the Carthaginians who had been in service at home from Hannibal's veteran army which had served in Italy. Polybius, XI, 19 tells us that his army was composed of Libyans, Iberians, Ligurians, Celts, Phoenicians, Italians, and Greeks, who had nothing in common with one another. Polybius XV, 11 makes the distinction of οἱ Καρχηδόνιοι and οἱ ἐξ Ἰταλίας ἦκοντες. In the same chapter, he says: "παρήγγειλε δὲ τοὺς ἰδίους στρατιώτας ἕκαστον παρακαλεῖν, ἀναφέροντας τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς νίκης ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὰς μεθ' αὐτοῦ παραγεγενημένας δυνάμεις· τοῖς δὲ Καρχηδονίοις ἐκέλευσε τοὺς ἡγουμένους τὰ συμβησόμενα περὶ τέκνων καὶ γυναικῶν ἐξαριθμεῖσθαι καὶ τιθῆναι πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν, ἐὰν ἄλλως πως ἐκβῇ τὰ τῆς μάχης. οὗτοι μὲν οὖν οὕτως ἐποίουν τὸ παραγγελθέν. Ἀννίβας δὲ τοὺς μεθ' αὐτοῦ παραγεγονότας ἐπιπορευόμενος ἤξιου καὶ παρεκάλει διὰ πλειόνων μνησθῆναι . . . ."

his army is simply a convention of which the historian avails himself for rhetorical effect. But, in view of the great importance of the final struggle at Zama and of the consciousness of it by both sides, we may well suppose that both the Roman and the Carthaginian generals addressed their men in some way.

One would naturally assume that Hannibal's foreign troops at the end of his Italian campaigns had a better command of Punic than did the non-Carthaginian and non-African forces with which he crossed the Alps. Yet Polybius<sup>63</sup> states that the Carthaginian army was successfully addressed by an interpreter, apparently a single interpreter, even before it crossed the Rhone. Magilus and other Gallic chiefs had come from the valley of the Po. A meeting of the soldiers was summoned and an interpreter declared to the whole army the resolutions of the friendly Gauls. Although the historian does not mention in what language the address was made, it was presumably Punic, the official language of Hannibal. Probably that was the common language known to most of the soldiers, and if the interpreter spoke Carthaginian, those that understood the message could make it known to such of their fellow-soldiers as had no acquaintance with that tongue. It is, of course, possible that the interpreter spoke in several languages, although Polybius makes no statement to that effect.

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<sup>63</sup> Polyb. III, 44.



## CHAPTER VI

### INTERPRETERS OF GREEK AND BARBARIAN LANGUAGES

#### I. GREEK AND EGYPTIAN

Herodotus does not inform us whether he knew the languages of any of the countries in which he traveled. He does, however, tell us that he used an interpreter in Egypt. Referring<sup>64</sup> to the inscription on the pyramid of Cheops in Egyptian characters, which recorded the quantity of radishes, onions, and garlic consumed by the laborers who constructed it, he pretends to remember perfectly well that the *interpreter*, who read the writing to him, said that the money expended in this way was sixteen hundred talents of silver.

Centuries later, an interpreter<sup>65</sup> was used by Germanicus, who had gone to Egypt to study archaeology, and had one of the older men of the priesthood interpret the Egyptian characters on the monuments at Thebes. It is very unlikely that the priest spoke Latin to him. In those days every educated Roman spoke Greek, and it is most probable that the priest interpreted the Egyptian into Greek.

#### 2. GREEK AND SEMITIC

If a government forbids the study of a certain foreign language, its citizens are obliged to use interpreters of that tongue.<sup>66</sup> The Carthaginians were waging war in Sicily under the leadership of Hanno. His enemy Suniatus, at that time the most powerful of the Carthaginians, out of hatred for him notified Dionysius, the tyrant at Syracuse, in Greek letters<sup>67</sup> of the

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<sup>64</sup> Hdt. II, 125.

<sup>65</sup> Tac. *Ann.* II, 60.

<sup>66</sup> Just. XX, 5, 11-13.

<sup>67</sup> It cannot be determined from the context whether the letter was composed in the Greek language or—a most remote possibility—in the Punic written in Greek characters.

approach of Hanno's army and of the slowness of the general. The letters were intercepted and the author convicted of treason, while the senate decreed<sup>68</sup> that no Carthaginian thereafter should study Greek letters or the Greek language, in order that he might not be able to hold either converse or correspondence with the enemy without the use of an interpreter.

As we pass on to Roman history, our attention is called to the use of an interpreter by Antony in his Parthian expedition.<sup>69</sup> As he was going to leave the country by the route through the plains, a certain Mithridates came from the enemy's camp and desired to be permitted to speak with some person who understood the Syrian<sup>70</sup> or the Parthian tongue. Alexander of Antioch, a close friend of Antony, went out to him, and after the Parthian had introduced himself, he warned Alexander against the route through the plains, saying that if the Romans took the mountain roads, they would have thirst and toil to contend with as usual; but that if Antony should proceed through the low lands, he must expect the fate of Crassus. Later Mithridates came again and Alexander was sent to him a second time.

We do not have much testimony to the study of Latin by Greeks, and it is very probable that Alexander did not know Latin. Of course, Antony was thoroughly conversant with Greek and he surely would not object to receiving his friend's report directly through that language. How Mithridates made his wishes known in the first place, does not worry Plutarch. Possibly he knew enough Greek for that simple purpose; but that is mere speculation, and we can only say that either Aramaic or Parthian was interpreted into Greek. Since Alexander came from Antioch, it seems more probable that Aramaic was their medium of conversation. If, however, they spoke Parthian, which was a dialect of Persian, this example should be cited under the fourth division of this chapter.

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<sup>68</sup> The law seems to have been passed when feeling ran very high against the Greek language, and to have fallen into disuse in later times. The greatest of the Carthaginians, Hannibal, wrote in Greek. Cf. Nepos, *Hann.* 13, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Plut. *Anton.* 46, 2; 48, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Presumably Aramaic is meant, which at this time was the *lingua franca* in Western Asia. The fact that Alexander came from Antioch, where many Jews dwelt, seems to justify an assumption that he spoke Aramaic.

One would not expect many Greeks and Romans to study any of the Semitic dialects. After the Hellenization of the Orient, Greek was fairly well diffused among the Jews, and the great historian Josephus himself acted as an interpreter. After Vespasian had taken him prisoner, he at first put him in bonds, but considering him a prophet, he later released him at the suggestion of Titus and loaded him with presents. Josephus appears to have been held in high esteem by the Flavians, and was with Titus at the siege of Jerusalem. In this connexion, he performed his services as an agent between his compatriots and Titus, and asserts that he was the only one<sup>71</sup> in the Roman camp who understood the news which the deserters brought during the siege of Jerusalem. It seems most probable that he spoke Greek<sup>72</sup> to the Roman general, although he nowhere intimates what language he used. He is silent about his knowledge of Latin, and it is doubtful whether he knew very much of that tongue at this period of his life.

Titus, knowing that exhortations are frequently more effectual than arms, tried to persuade the Jews to surrender their city in order to save themselves.<sup>73</sup> He sent Josephus to address them in their own vernacular, i. e., in Aramaic; for he imagined that they might yield to the persuasion of a fellow-countryman. During the progress of the siege, Titus gave orders to demolish the foundations of the citadel Antonia<sup>74</sup> and again had Josephus exhort the Jews. On this occasion, the historian took his stand in a place from which he might be heard, not only by John (the leader of the defenders), but by many more of the Jews, and then declared to them in the "Hebrew" language,<sup>75</sup> what Titus had instructed him to say.

As the siege continued, the Jews rose in sedition and began to kill one another. Titus was deeply affected at this state of

<sup>71</sup> Joseph. *Contra Apionem* I, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph. *Antiq. Iud.* XX, 11 (9), 2. Josephus here tells us that he understood the elements of Greek and that he had taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of that people. Still he could not pronounce their language with exactness, since he had been accustomed to speak his own tongue for so long a time before learning Greek.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph. *Bell. Iud.* V, 9, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph. *Bell. Iud.* VI, 2, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Of course the Aramaic, despite the wording of Josephus.



affairs and reproached John and his party. Again he had recourse to his interpreter Josephus,<sup>76</sup> but the robbers and the tyrant within the city thought that these exhortations proceeded from Titus' fear. The beleaguered city, however, could not withstand indefinitely the prowess of the Romans, and upon the Jews' application for mercy, Titus made a speech to the enemy<sup>77</sup> through an interpreter. The historian does not mention his name, but we can hardly imagine him to have been any other than Josephus.

### 3. GREEK AND INDIAN

Custom is king over all, although it may be totally different among various peoples. Herodotus<sup>78</sup> relates the story that Darius impressed this upon some Greeks, and that he had to use interpreters on the occasion. After he had succeeded to the throne, he called into his presence certain Greeks who were at hand and asked what he must pay them to induce them to eat the bodies of their dead fathers. They answered that no sum would persuade them to such an act. He then sent for certain Indians of the race called Callatians, men who eat their fathers, and asked them while the Greeks stood by and knew by the aid of an interpreter all that was said, what he should give them to burn the bodies of their fathers at their decease. The Indians exclaimed aloud and begged him not to speak of such a thing.

From this amusing incident of Darius, let us turn to the communication of Alexander with the Indians. When one of them, Hephaestion, approached Alexander the Great with the intention of surrendering all his forces, Alexander, thinking that he came as an enemy, prepared for battle. When the Indian saw the error of the Macedonians, he ordered the rest to halt and himself rode rapidly toward Alexander, who also advanced to meet him. From the expression on the faces of both, it could be seen that they were friends, but that they could not make

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph. *Bell. Iud.* VI, 2, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph. *Bell. Iud.* VI, 6, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Hdt. III, 38.

themselves understood without an interpreter. When one was brought, the barbarian addressed Alexander.<sup>79</sup>

In his dealings with the Indian philosophers, Alexander also used intermediaries. Some of the sages are said<sup>80</sup> to have been caught by the Macedonian, as they were walking in the open meadow where they were accustomed to spend their time. At the sight of him and his army, they did nothing else but stamp with their feet on the earth. When he asked them by means of interpreters what their actions meant, they replied. "King Alexander, every man possesses as much of the earth as this upon which we have stepped; but you being only a man like the rest of us, except in being meddlesome and arrogant, have come over so great a part of the earth from your own land, both having trouble yourself and giving it to others. And yet you also will soon die, and possess only so much of the soil as is sufficient for burying your body."

As a matter of fact, in the account of Alexander's dealings with these wise men of India, we find a reference<sup>81</sup> to a series of interpreters. He had sent Onesicritus to confer with the ascetics, and one of them, Mandanis by name, addressed Onesicritus. The Indian said that he was entitled to indulgence, if he was not able to demonstrate the utility of philosophy when conversing by means of *three interpreters*, who except the language knew no more than the vulgar. To attempt it, he maintained, was to expect water to flow pure through mud.

Yet it appears that experts were not always available to render Indian (at least some dialects of it) into Greek. A certain Indian<sup>82</sup> was brought to King Euergetes II by the guards of the Arabian Sea, who said they found him alone and half dead in a ship. Who he was and from where he came, they did not know, as they did not understand his language. The king gave him in charge of several men to be taught Greek. When he knew the language, he narrated how he had sailed from India, taken the wrong course, and lost his ship-mates through hunger.

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<sup>79</sup> Curt. VIII, 12, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Arrian, *Anab.* VII, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Strabo, XV, 1, 64, C 716.

<sup>82</sup> Strabo, II, 3, 4, C 98.

## 5. GREEK AND PERSIAN

An instance of making Persian intelligible to Greeks is furnished by Aristophanes.<sup>83</sup> Pseudartabas comes into the Athenian ecclesia, speaking what the author represents to be Persian. The herald says, "Do you understand what he says?" Dicaeopolis replies,<sup>1</sup> "No, by Apollo, I don't!" The herald, pretending to interpret, says, "He declares that the king will send us gold." Then ceasing to speak Persian, Pseudartabas utters a broken Greek.

To pass from the drama to the realm of history, it is related by Herodotus<sup>84</sup> that Syloson, an exile from Samos, gave, without accepting pay, his cloak to Darius while the latter was serving in Cambyses' body guard in Egypt. When Darius later became emperor, Syloson went to Susa, and upon his arrival, sat at the vestibule of the palace and said that he was a benefactor of the King. The gate-keeper, having heard this, reported the matter to his royal master. When Syloson was admitted to Darius' presence, the interpreters asked him who he was and what he had done that he should call himself a benefactor of the King. It appears therefore that the gate-keeper knew Greek; for he had no difficulty in reporting the message. No doubt a man in his position was required to know several languages.

In one case, we find that a man suffered death for translating Persian into Greek.<sup>85</sup> Themistocles was commended for arresting the interpreter attached to the King of Persia's ambassadors, who had been sent to Greece to demand earth and water. By a decree of the people, the interpreter was put to death for having presumed to make use of the Greek language to voice the demands of the barbarians.

Yet the Athenian himself later became a suppliant<sup>86</sup> of the Great King. He was brought before Xerxes, and after he had prostrated himself, stood silent. The King then commanded

<sup>83</sup> Arist. *Acharnians* 100 sqq.

<sup>84</sup> Hdt. III, 139-140.

<sup>85</sup> Plut. *Them.* 6, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Plut. *Moralia, Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata* 185, *Them.* 15-16; Plut. *Them.* 28, 1 sqq.; 29, 1-3; Nepos, *Them.* 10; Thuc. I, 137-138; Val. Max. VIII, 7, Ext. 15; Diod. Sic. XI, 57.



his linguists to ask who he was. An interpreter accordingly put the question and Themistocles in reply gave his name and said that he was an exile and was persecuted by the Greeks. The next morning Xerxes called the Athenian before him and in encouraging him, bade him declare freely whatever he had to propose concerning Greece. Themistocles replied that a man's discourse was like a piece of tapestry, which, when spread open, displays its figures, but when folded up, hides them from view. Therefore he requested time until he might learn the Persian language and be able to explain himself without any intermediary. The King was delighted with the comparison and bade him take what time he pleased. Themistocles desired a year, and within this time learned the language sufficiently well for his purpose.

We are informed that some interpreters could not only speak, but also read the Persian language. Thucydides narrates<sup>87</sup> that, at Eion on the Strymon, Aristides arrested Artaphernes, a Persian who was on his way from the King to the Lacedaemonians. When he had been conveyed to Athens, the dispatches which he carried were translated out of the Assyrian character<sup>88</sup> and read.

<sup>87</sup> Thuc. IV, 50.

<sup>88</sup> It appears that the Greeks used the expression Ἀσσύρια γράμματα loosely in referring to Persian writing. Cf. on Thuc. IV, 50, J. Classen, Thukydides, dritte Auflage bearbeitet von J. Steup, Berlin, 1900: . . . "und darum sind die Ἀσσύρια γράμματα (wie Herod. 4, 87) sowohl auf Sprache wie auf Schrift zu beziehen. Der Ausdruck Ἀσσύρια γρ. aber scheint von allem in Keilschrift Geschriebenen gebraucht worden zu sein, so dass wir wohl annehmen können, dass der Brief in persischer Sprache geschrieben war." On Hdt. IV, 87, cf. Rawlinson's note: "Herodotus, however, is no doubt inaccurate when he speaks here of *Assyrian* letters. The language and character used in the inscription would be the Persian, and not the Assyrian. But as moderns, till recently, have been accustomed to speak of '*the cuneiform language*,' not distinguishing between one sort of cuneiform writing and another, so Herodotus appears to have been ignorant that in the arrow-headed inscriptions which he saw, both the letters and the languages varied. There are, in point of fact, at least six different types of cuneiform writing, viz. the old Scythic Babylonian, the Susianian, the Armenian, the Scythic of the trilingual tablets, the Assyrian, and the Achaemenian Persian. Of these the first four are to a certain extent connected; but the Assyrian and Achaemenian Persian differ totally from them and from each other."

Thanks to the fascinating narrative of Xenophon, many interesting examples of interpreters have been recorded. When Epyaxa<sup>89</sup> visited Cyrus the Younger, he wished to show her his Greek mercenaries. So he sent Pigres, his interpreter, to order them to advance as for an attack. Yet he did not always employ this man; for we read in *Anab.* I, 4, 16, that he sent Glus to express his pleasure to Menon and his men who had crossed the Euphrates, while the rest of the mercenaries, being angry at Cyrus, refused to advance. Possibly Cyrus knew Greek; for in *Anab.* I, 7, 2, we find that he harangued and encouraged the Greek generals and captains. Here Xenophon does not say anything about an interpreter, unless he assumes as a matter of course that one was employed and so proceeds without making mention of the fact. On account of the importance of the Greeks in Asia Minor and through his close relations with them, it seems probable that a man of Cyrus' station knew their language. If he did not, we must assume that Clearchus knew some Persian. For in *Anab.* I, 8, 12,<sup>90</sup> we are informed that before the battle of Cunaxa Cyrus passed the army in review, accompanied by Pigres, his interpreter, and three or four others. Yet Xenophon expressly states that Cyrus shouted to Clearchus and ordered him to attack the Persian center. Even if Cyrus could not make a speech in Greek to encourage his mercenary officers, probably his command of the language was sufficient to enable him to use it in the army. We might perhaps assume that he issued his order to Clearchus in Persian. Although neither alternative can be proved,<sup>91</sup> it seems more likely that he spoke Greek to his Hellenic captain. But he may have used his interpreter in conversing with Greeks, where his po-

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<sup>89</sup> Xen. *Anab.* I, 2, 17.

<sup>90</sup> Xen. *Anab.* I, 8, 12: καὶ ἐν τούτῳ Κῦρος παρελαύνων αὐτὸς σὺν Πίγρητι τῷ ἑρμηνεῖ καὶ ἄλλοις τρισὶν ἢ τέτταρσι τῷ Κλεάρχῳ ἐβόα ἄγειν τὸ στράτευμα κατὰ μέσον τὸ τῶν πολεμίων, ὅτι ἐκεῖ βασιλεὺς εἶη.

<sup>91</sup> At the trial of Orontas, Xen. *Anab.* I, 6, 4 sqq., Cyrus summoned into his tent seven Persian nobles and Clearchus. No one else is mentioned as having been present. The trial of course was conducted in Persian. If Clearchus did not understand Persian, either Cyrus or one of the nobles had to interpret the proceedings for him. The Greek, at Cyrus' request, was the first to pronounce his verdict, but no mention is made of the language that Clearchus spoke or of that in which he was addressed.

sition as satrap required him to speak Persian or where the subject under discussion exceeded his knowledge of the Hellenic tongue.

Since Cyrus had both Greeks and Persians in his army, it was necessary to make announcements in both languages. As the King's army was approaching that of Cyrus,<sup>92</sup> Pategyas, a Persian, a trusty member of Cyrus' personal staff, came galloping up at full speed on his horse, which was bathed in sweat, and to every one he met he shouted in Greek and in Persian that the King was advancing with a large army, ready for battle.

After the battle of Cunaxa, Tissaphernes came from the King, and when the Greek generals had met him, he began the discourse, speaking through an interpreter.<sup>92a</sup> He said he wished to lead them in safety to their country, and considered it a privilege by which he would win gratitude from the Ten Thousand and from all Hellas. Since the King wished to know why they had marched against him, Tissaphernes counseled them to give a moderate answer so that it would be easier for him to carry out his design if he should obtain from the King any favors in behalf of the Greeks. The Hellenes retired and took counsel, and when they gave their reply, Clearchus was their spokesman. Xenophon does not inform us whether the Greek employed an interpreter or not. It is possible that Tissaphernes had a knowledge of colloquial Greek merely, and used the intermediary because he represented the King and so felt that it was incumbent upon him to speak the official language as a matter of dignity. Or he may have understood Greek without being able to speak it very fluently. In either case, he could have understood the remarks of Clearchus without the services of a translator. Possibly Tissaphernes knew no Greek and Xenophon simply over-

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<sup>92</sup> Xen. *Anab.* I, 8, 1.

<sup>92a</sup> Xen. *Anab.* II, 3, 17. We do not know whether this intermediary was a Persian or a Greek. Tissaphernes, however, had one Greek, Phalinus, on his staff and held him in great esteem. The day after the battle at Cunaxa, messengers (Xen. *Anab.* II, 1, 7 sqq.) came from the King and Tissaphernes, demanding the unconditional surrender of the Ten Thousand. Phalinus was the only one among these heralds that was a Greek. Probably he delivered the message; at any rate, he had a long conversation with the Hellenic officers after the King's wishes were made known.



looks the use of the interpreter who translated the speech of the Greek. Later on, at the request of Clearchus, they had a conference;<sup>92b</sup> here no intermediary is mentioned. If Tissaphernes knew Greek and no interpreter was used, he spoke that tongue on this occasion because Clearchus had made the overtures. In this case, he was not a legate from Artaxerxes, and so could be less formal. Possibly here also Tissaphernes, whether he could speak Greek or not, used an intermediary, though Xenophon fails to mention the fact. It is hardly likely that Clearchus spoke Persian at either conference.

On their retreat, the Ten Thousand used interpreters quite frequently; but that does not necessarily mean that they were accompanied by professionals who were able to speak the various languages and dialects of Persia which were encountered. Under the influence of the Persian rule, no doubt Persian was known by some people in the provinces, and whatever tongue the people of a district spoke, an interpreter speaking standard Persian might somehow make himself understood. We should not expect Xenophon to have an interpreter able to speak the dialect of the Carduchians; and yet through an interpreter he negotiated<sup>93</sup> with them for a truce and demanded the dead. The language of the modern Kurds is closely allied to Persian, and if we are right in assuming the *Καρδοῦχοι* to be the ancestors of the Kurds, possibly in those days an interpreter, speaking Persian, could manage to communicate with that people.

As they passed through Western Armenia<sup>94</sup>, Tiribazus, the lieutenant-governor and friend of the King, rode up to the Hellenes with a body of cavalry and, sending forth an interpreter, stated that he desired to speak with their commanders. The generals resolved to hear what he had to say; and advancing on their side to within speaking distance, they demanded what he wanted. He replied that he wished to make a treaty with them in accordance with which he on his side would abstain from injuring the Greeks, if the latter would not burn his houses, but merely take such provisions as they needed. The proposal satisfied the generals and a treaty was made on the terms suggested.

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<sup>92</sup> Xen. *Anab.* II, 5, 1 sqq.

<sup>93</sup> Xen. *Anab.* IV, 2, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Xen. *Anab.* IV, 4, 5.

In Armenia one day about dusk, Cheirisophus reached a village<sup>95</sup> and met some women and girls who had come from the village to fetch water at the fountain outside the wall. These asked the Greeks who they were. The interpreter said in Persian that they were on their way from the King to the satrap. The women replied that the satrap was not at home, but was a parasang farther on. Xenophon does not say that the women spoke Persian, although he tells us that the interpreter did so. Even if the Armenian women did not speak a pure Persian—and it is extremely unlikely that they did—the interpreter had no difficulty in conversing with them.

Later, in the course of their march in Armenia,<sup>96</sup> they were hospitably received. When Xenophon and the chief of one of the villages came to the division of Cheirisophus, they found the men feasting in their quarters, garlanded with wisps of hay, while Armenian boys in barbaric costumes were playing the part of waiters. The Greeks had to point out to the boys, just as to deaf and dumb persons, what they were to do. As soon as Cheirisophus and Xenophon had greeted each other, they obtained information from the village chieftain by means of their interpreter, who spoke the Persian language. Possibly the former, being a man of some consequence, may have learned Persian, though he was an Armenian.

At the time of Alexander, some of the Persians of importance were ignorant of Greek and had to use interpreters. Quintus Curtius<sup>97</sup> gives an instance of this in relating the incident of Patron, the commander of the Greeks in the service of Darius. For this man, foreseeing the design of Bessus to assassinate the King, followed Darius' chariot and watched for an opportunity to address him. Bessus, mistrusting him, kept close to the chariot. But Patron, having waited for a considerable time, and hesitating between fidelity and fear, kept his eyes fixed on the King, who eventually sent one of his eunuchs to inquire if he had anything to say. He replied that he had, but that he wished to speak without a witness. So he was ordered to draw near, and as Darius had no slight knowledge of Greek, Patron

<sup>95</sup> Xen. *Anab.* IV, 5, 10.

<sup>96</sup> Xen. *Anab.* IV, 5, 33-34.

<sup>97</sup> Curt. V, 11, 1 sqq.

spoke without an interpreter, asking that he, with his Greeks, might form the royal body-guard. Although Bessus was ignorant of the Greek language, he was afraid that Patron had informed against him, but he was relieved of his anxiety when the conversation was related to him by an interpreter.

The use of interpreters by Alexander in his invasion of Asia is mentioned in the ancient authors. For example, the mother and wife of Darius had fallen into the hands of Alexander and were falsely informed that Darius had been killed. Thereupon with the other captives of the nobility, they raised great cries and lamentations and disturbed the Macedonians at their banquet. On discovering the cause of their grief,<sup>98</sup> Alexander sent Mithrenes, who had surrendered Sardis and was skilled in the Persian language, to console them.

Alexander also had Asiatic troops<sup>99</sup> in his service and had to address them by means of an interpreter. This man doubtless spoke Persian to the soldiers, as that was of course the language known to the largest number.

In his expeditions into some of the remote provinces of the Great King, Alexander also had to use special linguists, although our authorities do not always clearly state whether these spoke Persian or the dialect of the country. During his invasion of the territory of the Mardians, a land bordering upon Hyrcania, his horse Bucephalus was stolen by the natives. Accordingly being transported with rage and grief beyond what was seemly, he ordered search to be made for his steed and had it announced<sup>100</sup> by an interpreter that if the Mardians did not restore the charger, not one of them should live. This declaration so terrified them that they not only restored the horse, but also gave him presents. The use of the interpreter implies that the proclamation was not made in Greek. Probably the people spoke a dialect closely resembling Persian, and under

<sup>98</sup> Curt. III, 12, 6.

<sup>99</sup> Curt. X, 3, 5-6.

<sup>100</sup> Curt. VI, 5, 19; Diod. Sic. XVII, 76, "διὰ δὲ τῶν ὁμοφώνων τοῖς ἐγγχωρίοις κηρύττειν." It is very probable that Diodorus Siculus refers to the dialect of the region, unless he is speaking loosely and means Persian. Doubtless an interpreter who spoke Persian with colloquial and provincial elements, had no difficulty in being understood in Margiana.



the influence of Persia's power, it is probable that a good many of the Mardians had an acquaintance with Persian. If this was the case, an interpreter making Alexander's proclamation in the Persian tongue, had no difficulty in being understood. On the other hand, it is very probable the announcement was made in the dialect of the country.

Again he used interpreters in Sogdiana. Among the captives<sup>101</sup> that were taken in this country were thirty of the highest nobility, who had remarkable strength of body. As these were led before the king and informed in their own language that they were condemned to death by his order, they began to sing a song of a joyous strain and with dances and wanton motions of their body to express a cheerfulness of mind. Alexander, struck by their conduct, asked them how they could be so joyful when they had death before their eyes. They replied that if they had been killed by any other, they would have died in sorrow; but now since they were to be restored to their ancestors by so great a king, the conqueror of all nations, they celebrated with these songs an honorable death—a death which brave men would seek most eagerly. On their pledge of fidelity with their lives, they were released. Sogdiana had long been under Persian influence; for we find in the Behistûn inscription<sup>102</sup> that it formed a part of the realm of Darius. Probably the people of this province spoke a dialect resembling Persian, and that tongue may also have been fairly well known. At any rate, we should expect the nobility to know the language of the ruling country. This makes it probable that the interpreters spoke Persian and Greek.

Still it appears that Alexander had a man who could speak the language of Sogdiana. News came to Alexander that Spitamenes<sup>103</sup> was besieging those whom he had left as a garrison in the citadel at Maracanda, in Sogdiana. He dispatched troops there, among them fifteen hundred mercenary infantry

<sup>101</sup> Curt. VII, 10, 4 sqq.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. The Sculptures and Inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistûn in Persia, ed. by L. W. King and R. C. Thomson, London, 1907: p. 4, Persian text, Column I, 16; p. 96, Susian Version, Column I, 13; p. 161, Babylonian Version, 6.

<sup>103</sup> Arrian, *Anab.* IV, 3.

over whom he placed Pharnuches,<sup>104</sup> the interpreter, who, though by birth a Lycian, was skilled in the language of the barbarians of this country and in other respects appeared clever in dealing with them. Whether Alexander's interpreters with the Mardians and the Sogdians spoke Persian or not, we do not know; but if a man speaking Persian was understood by the Armenian women, it is reasonable to suppose that that tongue was also understood by the Mardians and the Sogdians, especially by the latter.

#### 5. GREEK AND MISCELLANEOUS BARBARIAN LANGUAGES

As we return to the mercenaries of Cyrus the Younger, Xenophon calls our attention to a very interesting episode. On one occasion during their retreat, the Ten Thousand, simply by accident, happened to have among them a person who could speak the language of the country through which they passed. As the Macrones obstructed their march,<sup>105</sup> one of the peltasts came up to Xenophon and said that he had been a slave at Athens and that he wished to tell him that he recognized the speech of these people. "I think," said he, "this is my native country and, if there is no objection, I will have a talk with them." "No objection at all," replied Xenophon, "pray do, and ask them first who they are." In answer to this question, they said that they were Macrones. "Well, then," said Xenophon, "ask them why they are drawn up in battle and want to fight with us." They answered, "Because you are invading our country." The generals bade him say that they intended no harm, but had been at war with the King and were now returning to Hellas, while all they wanted was to reach the sea. The Macrones asked whether they were willing to give pledges to that effect. The Greeks replied that they were willing both to give and to receive them. Then the Macrones gave a barbaric lance to the Greeks and they in turn a Hellenic lance to them. These the Macrones said would serve as pledges, and

<sup>104</sup> L. c., "ἐπιτάσσει δὲ αὐτοῖς Φαρνούχην τὸν ἑρμηνέα, τὸ μὲν γένος Λύκιον τὸν Φαρνούχην, ἐμπείρωσ δὲ τῆς τε φωνῆς τῶν ταύτῃ βαρβάρων ἔχοντα, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὁμιλῆσαι αὐτοῖς δεξιὸν φαινόμενον." It is possible that Arrian means the particular dialect of the region.

<sup>105</sup> Xen. *Anab.* IV, 8, 4 sqq.

both sides called the gods to witness. In the other quoted passages, the use of the interpreter was simply mentioned, but here the author takes pains to tell us how the linguist was prompted for every sentence that he spoke. It would, indeed, be impossible for a man to make a long speech and then expect the translator to repeat from memory the same words without errors or omissions.

A little later, the Hellenes continued their retreat from Cerasus to the frontiers of the Mossynoecians. A conference of the Mossynoecian chiefs and the generals of the Greeks was then arranged by Timesitheus of Trapezus, who was proxenus of this people. Xenophon made a speech, which was interpreted by Timesitheus.<sup>106</sup> An alliance was then made with the Mossynoecians against their hostile subjects to the West.

Leaving the Ten Thousand for the time being until they shall have returned to European soil, we find that Greek-speaking commanders used interpreters when they had to deal with an army of various nationalities. Before engaging in the battle of Rhabdia with Pompey, Antiochus and Ptolemy<sup>107</sup> went along their respective lines and addressed words of encouragement and exhortation to their officers, while they called upon those who were going to engage to maintain the fight with a manly and courageous spirit. Some of these words they delivered by their own lips, others through interpreters.

#### 6. GREEK AND THRACIAN

In narrating the later fortunes of the Ten Thousand, Xenophon incidentally mentions the use of interpreters of Greek and Thracian. When they were upon European soil, Xenophon desired to speak with the Thracian chieftain Seuthes,<sup>108</sup> and therefore sent the interpreter whom he happened to have with him, ordering him to inform Seuthes that Xenophon was there and desired a conference with him. About two hundred pel-tasts then came and conducted Xenophon to the Thracian, and a conference followed. Probably they used an interpreter also at the meeting, although, as we shall see, Seuthes under-

<sup>106</sup> Xen. *Anab.* V, 4, 4.

<sup>107</sup> Polyb. V, 83.

<sup>108</sup> Xen. *Anab.* VII, 2, 19.



stood Greek fairly well. That does not, however, imply that he could speak the language with any degree of fluency, and although he might have followed without help all or almost all that Xenophon said, it is most likely that he himself spoke Thracian.

Being soldiers by profession, Xenophon and the Greeks entered the service of Seuthes; but when the Lacedaemonians were going to fight against Tissaphernes, envoys were sent from Sparta to Thrace to get the troops. Seuthes and Heracleides brought the two Laconian agents to the army, which was then addressed by the envoys. The Thracian chieftain remained within earshot<sup>109</sup> to hear what was going on, and not being willing to take any chances, he had his interpreter at his side although he himself understood most things<sup>109a</sup> that were spoken in Greek.

Subsequently,<sup>110</sup> Seuthes sent Abrozelmēs, his private interpreter, to Xenophon, urging him to stay behind with one thousand hoplites and promising to deliver to him the places on the sea coast and to fulfill other promises in their previous agreement. He also added that if he fell into the clutches of the Lacedaemonians, Thibron was certain to put him to death. But in obedience to the omens, Xenophon refused.

Thus we see that the *Anabasis* of Xenophon and the records of the expedition of Alexander furnish us with a fairly extensive account of the use of interpreters by an army and a general. Xenophon does not forget that two languages prevailed in Cyrus' forces, and so he takes pains to state that Pategyas gave the alarm of the King's approach both in Persian and in Greek. Cyrus had his interpreter Pigres, who, when Epyaxa visited the army, carried his order to the Greeks to make a charge; again before the battle at Cunaxa, the Persian was accompanied by Pigres, his interpreter. After that memorable conflict, Tissaphernes, at a conference with the Greek generals, spoke through

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<sup>109</sup> Xen. *Anab.* VII, 6, 8.

<sup>109</sup> At a banquet with the Hellenic officers, Seuthes did not, however, understand a remark that the gourmand Arystas made to the cupbearer (Xen. *Anab.* VII, 3, 24-25). Since the latter could speak Greek, he interpreted the words to his royal master.

<sup>110</sup> Xen. *Anab.* VII, 6, 43.

an intermediary. The Hellenes also had their interpreter, as Xenophon informs us in *Anab.* II, 5, 35. On the retreat, interpreters were used in speaking with the Carduchians, with Tiribazus, the lieutenant-governor of Armenia, with the women of an Armenian village, with a village chief in Armenia, with the Macronians, and with the Mossynoecians. Finally when the Ten Thousand were on European soil, both Seuthes the Thracian and Xenophon employed special linguists.

Alexander, during his invasion of Asia, employed a "bilingual" guide and used an interpreter to console the wife and mother of Darius. He also addressed his Asiatic troops by means of one. He had recourse to the same expedient in making a proclamation in Margiana and in conversing with the noble captives from Sogdiana. When he sent an expedition into the latter country, the forces were commanded by Pharnuches, his interpreter, who was skilled in the language of the country. He also used his linguistic experts in conversing with Hephaestion and with the Indian philosophers. Especially interesting is the conversation between the philosopher Mandanis and Onesicritus, the representative of Alexander; on this occasion a series of three interpreters was used.

## CHAPTER VII

### INTERPRETERS OF LATIN AND GREEK

Without considering in this chapter the use of Greek and Latin in Roman executive and judicial administration, let us go back to the time of Cato the Elder, who according to Plutarch<sup>111</sup> had accompanied M'. Acilius Glabrio into Greece as a military tribune. He made a considerable stay at Athens, and some people asserted that he delivered an oration in Greek to the Athenians. This account, according to Plutarch, was not true, for he spoke to them through another person; not that he was ignorant of Greek, but because he chose to adhere to the customs of his country, and laughed at those who admired nothing that was not Greek. The Athenians admired the strength and conciseness of his language; for what he delivered in few words, the interpreter reported at length and with many words; insomuch that he left them in the opinion that the expressions of the Greeks flowed only from the lips, while those of the Romans came from the heart.

Even as late as the time of Cicero, when cultured Romans knew Greek thoroughly, interpreters were used in official communications with Hellenic communities, most probably as a matter of national pride. Cicero<sup>112</sup> mentions Cn. Publicius Menander, a freedman, whom the Roman ambassadors setting out for Greece wished to have with them.

But the Romans did not always use interpreters in their embassies to Hellenic lands. Appian<sup>113</sup> narrates that L. Cornelius (282 B. C.) had gone sight-seeing along the coast of Magna Graecia with ten decked ships. The Tarentines sank four and captured one with all on board, and sacked Thurii, an ally of

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<sup>111</sup> Plut. *Cato Maior* 12.

<sup>112</sup> Cic. *Balb.* 11, 28.

<sup>113</sup> Appian, III, *De Rebus Samniticis* 7.



Rome. When the Romans learned of these events they sent an embassy to Tarentum, and demanded that the men, who had been taken not as prisoners of war, but as mere sight-seers, should be brought back to their homes; that the property that had been seized as plunder or an equivalent of what had been lost, should be restored; and finally that they should surrender the authors of these crimes, if they wished to continue on good terms with the Romans. The Tarentines made difficulties about admitting the embassy to their council at all, and when they had received them, jeered at them because they did not speak Greek perfectly and made fun of their togas and of the purple stripe upon them.

As we leave the republican period and pass on to the empire, one of the incidents related by Suetonius<sup>114</sup> makes us feel reasonably certain that on this particular occasion Greek was interpreted into Latin. When Tiridates, the king of Armenia, came to Rome, Nero permitted him to throw himself at his feet, but quickly raised him with his right hand and kissed him. The emperor then, as Tiridates was making his prayer unto him, took the turban from the king's head and replaced it by a crown, while a man of praetorian rank interpreted the words of the suppliant king to the multitude. The context implies that Nero had no difficulty in understanding what Tiridates said, but surely no one would assume that Nero knew Armenian or any other oriental language. Tiridates must have spoken Greek,<sup>115</sup> which the Roman multitude would not have understood and which accordingly had to be interpreted.

<sup>114</sup> Suet. *Nero* 13.

<sup>115</sup> Greek was well known in the Orient, especially after the conquests of Alexander. The ruling classes in particular had an acquaintance with the Greek language and literature. Plutarch, *Crassus* 33, gives an example of this. Hyrodes, the Parthian king (a contemporary of M. Crassus) was reconciled to Artavasdes, the Armenian, and agreed to a marriage between that prince's sister and his own son Pacorus. They went to each other's entertainments, where many tales from Greece were represented. For, he says, Hyrodes was not unversed either in the language or in the literature of that country. In the same passage, speaking of Artavasdes, he says: "καὶ τραγωδίας ἐποίησεν καὶ λόγους ἔγραψε καὶ ἱστορίας, ὧν ἔνιαι διασώζονται." Plutarch does not state in what language Artavasdes wrote, but we may infer that he means Greek. Now if these two Orientals knew that language, it is safe to assume that Tiridates, who lived at a later period, did also.

## CHAPTER VIII

### INTERPRETERS OF LATIN AND BARBARIAN LANGUAGES

Again, leaving out of consideration in this chapter the use of interpreters in Roman executive and judicial administration, we find that Etruscan was interpreted into Latin, and Latin into Etruscan. In 301 B. C., after the Romans had been defeated by their northern neighbors, the dictator M. Valerius Maximus advanced into the territory of Rusellae.<sup>116</sup> The enemy followed and endeavored to use a stratagem. There were, at a short distance from the Roman camp, the half-ruined houses of a town burnt in the devastation of the country. Among these they concealed a body of troops, and then drove on some cattle within view of a Roman post commanded by the lieutenant Cn. Fulvius. Since this temptation did not induce any of the Romans to stir from his station, one of the herdsmen advanced close to the works and called out to the other Etruscans, who at their leisure were driving out the cattle from the ruins of the town. He asked why they remained idle when they might safely drive the herd through the middle of the Roman camp. This was interpreted to the lieutenant by some natives of Caere, and soon great impatience was felt through every company of the soldiers, who nevertheless dared not move without orders. Then Fulvius commanded some who were skilled in the language, to observe attentively whether the dialect of the herdsmen was that of rustics or that of townsmen. These reported that the enemy's accent in speaking, as well as their manner and appearance, was of a more polished cast than suited rustics. "Go then," said Fulvius, "tell them that they may uncover the ambush which they evidently conceal; that the Romans understand all their devices, and can now be no more taken by stratagem than they can be conquered by

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<sup>116</sup> Liv. X, 4.

arms." When these words were heard and reported to those who lay in ambush, they immediately disclosed themselves.

We may safely assume that a good many people on the border of Etruria and Latium knew both Latin and Etruscan, and that it was an easy matter to find interpreters of the two languages. One would think that it was more difficult to find, on the spur of the moment, a man who knew both Latin and Punic. Yet we have record of an interpreter who could read the latter tongue. Livy<sup>117</sup> tells us that the four Gallic horsemen and the two Numidians who had been sent with a letter by Hasdrubal to Hannibal were caught and sent to the consul Claudius Nero. Claudius had the letters read to him by an interpreter, and learned that Hasdrubal was going to meet Hannibal in Umbria. Whether this linguist was a professional or not, we do not know. It is possible that during a war of such great importance, the Romans had experts in the Carthaginian language. They certainly could not put absolute confidence in Punic prisoners of war in momentous matters.

Again, interpreters were used when the two great heroes of the Second Punic War met face to face.<sup>118</sup> Before the battle of Zama, Scipio and Hannibal had a colloquy, each having advanced from his camp accompanied by a few attendants. When they came near each other, they left these escorts and met in the middle of the intervening space, each accompanied by an interpreter. Surely Scipio knew Greek, since every cultured Roman in his day learned that language. Cornelius Nepos<sup>119</sup> informs us that Hannibal knew Greek. He also knew Latin,<sup>120</sup> but he spoke it with a foreign accent.<sup>121</sup> Under these conditions

<sup>117</sup> Liv. XXVII, 43, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Polyb. XV, 6; Liv. XXX, 30.

<sup>119</sup> Nep. *Hann.* 13, 2.

<sup>120</sup> Cassius Dio, Zonaras VIII, 24, 8, in Boissevain, Vol. I, p. 207.

<sup>121</sup> Plut. *Fab. Max.* 6, 1; Liv. XXII, 13. In 217 B. C., Hannibal resolved to march from Samnium into Campania and commanded his guide (Plutarch gives it in the plural) to conduct him into the territory of Casinum. But since he spoke with a Carthaginian accent and mispronounced the Latin words, the guide misunderstood him and thought that he said Casilinum instead of Casinum; so that turning from the high road, he led him through the territories of Allifae, Calatia, and Cales down into the plain of Stellas. Hannibal called the man and asked him where he was. He replied that he would lodge that night at Casilinum; but when Hannibal discovered the mistake and learned that Casinum lay at a very great distance in quite a different direction, he had his guide scourged and crucified.



they could have held their parley without interpreters, but national pride demanded that each man speak the vernacular of his own people.

Later on in Roman history, interpreters were used in a secret conference<sup>122</sup> held by Sulla and Bocchus, the king of Mauretania and father-in-law of Jugurtha. To preserve secrecy, they employed only such linguists as they could trust.

That interpreters were regularly used by the Romans in dealing with the Gauls during the time of Julius Caesar, is shown by the words *cotidianis interpretibus* in Caesar *B. G.* I, 19, 3, where he narrates his conversation with Diviciacus, the friend of the Roman people. Caesar (*l. c.*) describes the colloquy thus: "Diviciacum ad se vocari iubet et, cotidianis interpretibus remotis, per C. Valerium Procillum (Trocillum?), principem Galliae provinciae, familiarem suum, cui summam omnium rerum fidem habebat, cum eo colloquitur. To quote Professor Rolfe:<sup>123</sup> "Apparently the only other direct reference to interpreters in Caesar's works besides the one quoted above, although he must have made constant use of them, is in *B. G.* v. 36. 1: 'his rebus permotus Q. Titurius, cum procul Ambiorigem suos cohortantem conspexisset interpretem suum Cn. Pompeium ad eum mittit rogatum ut sibi militibusque parcat.' The use of an interpreter is implied in *B. G.* i. 47. 4, where C. Valerius Procillus is sent to talk with Ariovistus, 'propter linguae Gallicae scientiam, qua multa iam Ariovistus longinqua consuetudine utebatur.' Ariovistus, then, in spite of his apparent knowledge of what was going on in Rome, did not speak Latin (at least not readily) and the message from the *nobiles principesque populi Romani* who would have been glad to hear of Caesar's taking off (*B. G.* i. 44. 12) were doubtless conveyed to him through the medium of Gallic-speaking interpreters. Probably the interchange of speeches between Ariovistus and Caesar was made in the same way. At any rate it is obvious that in the speeches of Ariovistus we have the substance of his remarks reported in Caesar's own language.

<sup>122</sup> Sall. *Iug.* 109, 4.

<sup>123</sup> Classical Journal VII, p. 128.

"The interpreters who are mentioned by name by Caesar appear to be Romans, or more probably Romanized Gauls. Doubtless a few Romans spoke Celtic, although Caesar apparently did not at the beginning of his campaigns in Gaul, but as has been said, it is highly improbable that any considerable number of the inhabitants of Gallia Comata spoke anything more than traders' Latin. Whether the *mercatores* from whom Caesar obtained information at various times (e. g., *B. G.* iv. 20. 4), and from whom his army heard terrifying reports of the size and courage of the German followers of Ariovistus, were Italians or Gauls is not stated. In either case they probably had a slight and mainly professional command of Latin or of Celtic, as the case may be." No doubt many Romans in Northern Italy spoke Gallic, just as many Gauls in the same section could probably speak Latin. Possibly a good many Gauls<sup>124</sup> and Germans learned Latin by serving in the Roman army. Thus, according to Tacitus,<sup>125</sup> Arminius learned Latin while serving in a camp as leader of a detachment of his people.

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Mommsen, *History of Rome*, Book V, chap. VIII (Vol. V, p. 30. Eng. translation, 1900): "In free Gaul itself, i. e., among the Arverni, the Roman language was not unknown even before the conquest; although this knowledge was probably still restricted to few, and even the men of rank of the allied canton of the Haedui had to be conversed with through interpreters." His view is that among the "breeches-wearing" Gauls of the south the knowledge of Latin was more general, but that even there its quality was not high. *Op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 10: "This bad Latin was sufficient to enable even the remote Allobroges to transact business with Rome, and even to give testimony in the Roman courts without an interpreter."

Mommsen seems to believe in an early knowledge of Latin among the Gauls. If he is right in his supposition, we must not suppose that Latin, at an early date, supplanted Gallic. Indeed the latter seems to have persisted long after the introduction of the Roman culture. Claudian, *Epig.* I, 19-20, tells us that muleteers used Gallic in driving their animals: "Miraris, si voce feras pacaverit Orpheus, | Cum pronas pecudes Gallica verba regant." A passage from Ulpian, *lib. II fideicommissorum*, quoted in Justinian's *Digest*, XXXII, 11, also points to a rather late persistence of the Gallic speech: "Fideicommissa quocumque sermone relinqui possunt non solum Latina vel Graeca, sed etiam Punica vel Gallicana, vel alterius cuiuscumque gentis." It seems that the adjectives Latina, Graeca, etc. agree with "lingua" understood from "sermone."

<sup>125</sup> Tac. *Ann.* II, 10.

It is recorded that on a certain occasion a Roman freedman interpreted the wishes of a distant nation to the people of Rome. During the reign of Claudius, an embassy came from the island of Taprobane<sup>126</sup>. This took place under the following circumstances: Annius Plocamus had farmed for the treasury the revenues from the Red Sea. A certain freedman of his, Rachias by name, while sailing around Arabia, was carried away by a gale from the north beyond the coast of Carmania. In the course of fifteen days he had drifted to Hippurus, a port of Taprobane, where he was most kindly and hospitably received by the king; after a study of six months he became well acquainted with the language and was enabled to answer all his inquiries relative to the Romans and their emperor. But of all that he heard, the king was particularly struck with surprise at the Romans' rigid notions of justice. For this reason especially, he was prompted to form an alliance with them, and accordingly sent to Rome an embassy consisting of four persons, the chief of whom was Rachias, through whom as interpreter the negotiations must have been carried on.

Later on in the history of the Roman empire, we find that the emperor Caracalla<sup>127</sup> used interpreters. He would often converse with emissaries sent from the provinces, and in the presence of no one but his linguists, would urge them, in case any catastrophe befell him, to invade Italy and march upon Rome, assuring them that it would be very easy to capture the city. Then to prevent his traitorous advice from being divulged, he would put the interpreters to death immediately.

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<sup>126</sup> Plin. *N. H.* VI, 22, 24, §84-5.

<sup>127</sup> Cassius Dio, LXXVIII, 6.



## CHAPTER IX

### INTERPRETERS IN ROMAN EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION

Cicero<sup>128</sup> refers to the employment of interpreters in the Roman Senate as the regular custom. One early example concerning the Greek tongue indicates the same practice. In 155 B. C., the Athenians sent three philosophers,<sup>129</sup> Carneades of the Academy, Diogenes the Stoic, and Critolaus the Peripatetic, to the Senate, to ask that the Romans remit the fine of almost five hundred talents, which they had imposed on account of the devastation of Oropus. When they were introduced into the Senate, C. Acilius performed the office of interpreter.

The feeling of the emperor Tiberius about the etiquette of senatorial business in respect to language was strong, to judge from Suet. *Tib.* 71: "Sermone Graeco quamquam alioqui promptus et facilis, non tamen usque quaque usus est abstinuitque maxime in senatu. . . . Militem quoque Graece testimonium interrogatum nisi Latine respondere vetuit." Yet according to Cassius Dio,<sup>130</sup> Tiberius was wont to hear many suits that were argued there in the Greek language and to investigate many himself. Probably he did not speak that tongue in the Senate unless it was necessary, as in the case of Hellenes or Greek-speaking foreigners. In those cases he

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<sup>128</sup> Cic. *De div.* II, 64, 131: "Qualis autem ista mens est deorum, si neque ea nobis significant in somnis, quae ipsi per nos intellegamus, neque ea, quorum interpretes habere possimus? Similes enim sunt dei, si ea nobis obiciunt, quorum nec scientiam neque explanatorem habeamus, tamquam si Poeni aut Hispani in senatu nostro loquerentur sine interprete"; *De fin.* V, 29, 89: "Ita, quem ad modum in senatu semper est aliquis, qui interpretem postulit, sic isti (Stoici) nobis cum interprete audiendi sunt."

<sup>129</sup> Gell. VI, 14, 8 sq.; Plutarch, *Cato Maior* 22, in noting this incident, mentions only Carneades and Diogenes and the interpreter C. Acilius.

<sup>130</sup> Cassius Dio, LVII, 15.

may have been lenient and have allowed the proceedings to be conducted in their vernacular. We may safely say that he did not want Romans to speak Greek in the Senate. Possibly the soldier (Suet. *Tib.* 71), who according to Cassius Dio (*l. c.*) was a centurion, and who wished to give his evidence in Greek, was a Roman. If such was the case, Tiberius may have thought it presumptuous<sup>131</sup> for the soldier to speak in the Hellenic tongue, although he allowed him to be questioned in that language. Possibly the centurion had served many years in the East, and consequently his ear may have been more accustomed to Greek than to Latin, even though he were a Roman by birth. Tiberius knew sufficiently well that the soldier had not entirely forgotten his vernacular, and although he made one important concession in the asking of the evidence, he compelled him to use the speech which befitted a native born Roman.

According to Valerius Maximus,<sup>132</sup> the custom of speaking Greek in the Senate, began with Molo at the time of Sulla's dictatorship. Again, we find that Greek was spoken in the Roman Senate in the reign of Claudius, who bestowed consular honors on Agrippa of Palestine and enlarged his domain, since the Jew during his stay at Rome had helped Claudius become emperor. To his brother Herod, he gave praetorial dignities and some authority. The brothers were allowed to enter the Senate and express their thanks to him in Greek.<sup>133</sup> The historian adds that these were acts of Claudius himself, which were lauded by all. This is explained by Mommsen (*Staatsr.* III, 960) on the ground that they possessed the privilege of Roman citizenship. Why he resorts to this explanation does not seem clear, since it is evident from the passages quoted from Valerius Maximus and Cassius Dio that to speak Greek in the Roman Senate was not uncommon. Tiberius allowed the centurion

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<sup>131</sup> When Philotas, the son of Parmenio, was tried for conspiracy against Alexander, he preferred speaking Greek to using his native Macedonian. Cf. *Curt.* VI, 9, 34 sqq.

<sup>132</sup> Val. Max. II, 2, 3: "Quis ergo huic consuetudini, qua nunc Graecis actionibus aures curiae exsurdantur, ianuam patefecit? Ut opinor Molo rhetor, qui studia M. Ciceronis acuit. Eum namque ante omnes exterarum gentium in senatu sine interprete auditum constat."

<sup>133</sup> Cassius Dio, LX, 8.

to be questioned in that language, though he required him to answer in Latin. Thus, while the Romans were strict in using interpreters abroad as a matter of principle, it appears that they were more flexible about the matter at home. If in the provinces dignity was added to their rule by conducting their judicial proceedings in Latin, surely no prestige was lost by allowing Greek to be spoken in the Senate of the capital of the world, where it was familiar to every educated man. Still it is possible that sometimes Greek was interpreted into Latin in the Senate.

In passing to the use of interpreters by the provincial governors, we note that Verres,<sup>134</sup> like other men of similar position, employed interpreters in Hellenic Sicily. We know that one called Aulus Valentius<sup>135</sup> served him in this capacity.

Probably interpreters were necessary in many of the provinces, for we know of no Roman whose linguistic attainments were equal to those of Mithridates or Cleopatra. There, however, it was not a question of linguistic ability, but a matter of national pride<sup>136</sup> and principle, as Valerius Maximus<sup>137</sup> states, and not of mere necessity.

At this point, let us quote once more from Professor Rolfe<sup>138</sup>: "Not many of the names of the interpreters are given in full.

<sup>134</sup> Cic. *Verr.* II, II, 22, 54; II, IV, 22, 49; II, III, 37, 84; II, IV, 26, 58.

<sup>135</sup> Consult last two references of preceding footnote.

<sup>136</sup> According to Strabo, XIII, 4, 12, C 629, the Romans did not form their judicial districts according to tribes and languages. He maintains that this has contributed not a little to produce confusion in those regions bordering on the Lydians and Mysians towards the south and extending to Mount Taurus. This region was so intermixed that the limits of Phrygia, Lydia, Caria, and Mysia were difficult to distinguish.

<sup>137</sup> Val. Max. II, 2, 2: "Magistratus vero prisce quantopere suam populi Romani maiestatem retinentes se gesserint hinc cognosci potest, quod inter cetera obtinendae gravitatis indicia illud quoque magna cum perseverantia custodiebant, ne Graecis umquam nisi Latine responsa darent. Quin etiam ipsos linguae volubilitate, qua plurimum valent, excussa per interpretem loqui cogebant, non in urbe tantum nostra, sed etiam in Graecia et Asia, quo scilicet Latinae vocis honos per omnes gentes venerabilior diffunderetur. Nec illis deerant studia doctrinae, sed nulla non in re pallium togae subici debere arbitrabatur, indignum esse existimantes inlecebris et suavitati litterarum imperii pondus et auctoritatem donari."

<sup>138</sup> Class. Jour. VII, p. 129.



Cn. Publicius Menander was a freedman of Greek birth, as appears both from the form of his name and from Cicero's express statement. It seems probable that in many cases the interpreters were freedmen<sup>139</sup> or slaves, and that the languages which they interpreted into Latin were their native tongues. We may well suppose that their Latin, like the English of foreign guides and dragomans, was fluent rather than idiomatic and elegant. This is especially likely to have been the case outside of Italy, if, as Mommsen thinks (*Staatsr.* I, 352), the magistrates did not bring their interpreters with them from Rome.

"Interpreters formed a part of the *apparitores* of the magistrates and of the imperial court, and are occasionally mentioned in inscriptions."<sup>140</sup>

After the battle of Pydna, Perseus was taken prisoner and brought before Aemilius Paulus. He asked the king in Greek<sup>141</sup> what wrong had led him to undertake a war against the Roman people with such a hostile spirit, thus bringing himself and his kingdom to ultimate ruin. But the king, looking down upon the earth, wept in silence and made no reply. Again the consul addressed him, but Perseus uttered not a word. Then Aemilius Paulus, speaking once more in Latin<sup>142</sup> and pointing to Perseus, bade the members of his council, with such a sight before their eyes, not to be too elated in the hour of success, nor to take any extreme or inhuman measures against any one,

<sup>139</sup> So was the Menander mentioned *Dig.* XLIX, 15, 5, 3: "Et ideo in quodam interprete Menandro, qui, posteaquam apud nos manumissus erat, missus est ad suos, non est visa necessaria lex, quae lata est de illo, ut maneret civis Romanus; nam sive animus ei fuisset remanendi apud suos, desineret esse civis, sive animus fuisset revertendi, maneret civis, et ideo esset lex supervacua."

<sup>140</sup> Orelli-Henzen 4204:

C. IANVARINVS || SEXTVS || INTERPRES || VIVOS SIBI || FECIT.

Orelli-Henzen 6319:

D. m. || L. DOMITIO. 1. 1. || HELIODORO . . . . . || DOMITIVS. PHILETVS || INTERPRES. AVG. N. || EDVCATORI || DIGNISSIMO FECIT.

<sup>141</sup> Liv. XLV, 8, 6: "haec Graeco sermone Perseo, Latine deinde suis . . . . inquit."

<sup>142</sup> Polyb. XXIX, 20: "ὁ δὲ μεταλαβὼν τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν διάλεκτον . . . . ."

nor in fact ever to feel the permanence of their present good fortune, since it is uncertain what the evening may bring; rather it was precisely at the time of greatest success, either public or private, that a man should be most alive to the possibility of a reverse; even so it was difficult for a man to exhibit moderation in good fortune; but the distinction between fools and wise men was that the former learned only by their own misfortunes, the latter also by those of their neighbors.

On the day on which Paulus had ordered ten chiefs from each of the states to assemble at Amphipolis,<sup>143</sup> he seated himself on his tribunal, with the ten commissioners that had been appointed by the Senate. Here he was surrounded by the whole multitude of the Macedonians. When silence had been proclaimed by the herald, Paulus promulgated in the Latin tongue the regulations adopted by the Senate and by himself with the advice of the council. Then Cn. Octavius, the praetor, repeated the same in Greek. After the battle we see in Aemilius Paulus the generous conqueror who, out of regard for the vanquished king, addressed Perseus directly without interposing the barrier of an interpreter; before the assembly at Amphipolis, he is the representative of the Roman people and accordingly speaks Latin.

A Roman conqueror, however, did not always use his native tongue in addressing a vanquished nation. Thus Octavian, when pardoning the Egyptians in 30 B. C., addressed them in Greek<sup>144</sup> in order that they might understand him.

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<sup>143</sup> Liv. XLV, 29.

<sup>144</sup> Cassius Dio, LI, 16.

## CHAPTER X

### INTERPRETERS OF A BARBARIAN LANGUAGE AND ONE OR THE OTHER OF THE CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

The Greek and Latin authors do not always state whether it was Latin or Greek into which the barbarian languages were interpreted<sup>145</sup>; and occasionally the period of history at which the events took place does not permit us to form a definite conclusion. As an incident of this sort, Josephus recounts<sup>146</sup> a most interesting story of the use of an intermediary. When Agrippa had been bound by the order of Tiberius, he, with many others who were in the same condition, stood before the imperial palace, leaning in his grief against a certain tree on which an owl happened to be perched. Then one of the captives, a German, noted the Jew and asked the soldier to whom he was bound, who that man in purple was; and when he was informed that his name was Agrippa, and that he was a Jew and one of the principal men of his nation, he requested the soldier to approach nearer to Agrippa in order that he might converse with him, saying that he had a mind to inquire about certain things that related to his country. When he had obtained this permission, he approached him and told him through an interpreter, appealing to his native gods and those of Rome, that what he was going to say about Agrippa's affairs was done neither with a desire to win favor nor to make him cheerful without cause; for such predictions, if they failed, would make

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<sup>145</sup> An incident of this nature is recorded by Ammianus Marcellinus, XIX, 11, 5. The emperor Constantius II sent two tribunes, each with an interpreter, to the Limigantes, a Sarmatian tribe. Possibly the tribunes spoke Latin, but it is just as likely, if not more probable, that they spoke Greek to their interpreters.

<sup>146</sup> Joseph. *Antiq. Jud.* XVIII, 6, 7.



his grief in the end more real and bitter than if he had never heard of any such thing. But he informed him that the gods would provide for him and that he would soon be delivered out of his bonds and promoted to the highest dignity and power, while he would be envied by all those who then pitied him on account of his hard fortune; that he would be happy until his death and leave his happiness to his children. But he also informed him that, when he saw an owl again, death was but five days off. However, he thought it would have been unjust to deprive him of his knowledge of the future, since he could endure his bondage more lightly in view of what was in store for him. In closing, he bade Agrippa remember him in his prosperity and free him from his misery. When the German said this, Agrippa laughed at him as much as he afterwards marveled when the predicted happiness became a reality. We do not know whether the German spoke Latin and had it interpreted into Greek, or whether he spoke his Teutonic dialect. At any rate, it seems improbable that his speech was interpreted from German or Latin into Hebrew, i. e., Aramaic. We have seen above that Agrippa could speak Greek, but we have no evidence of his knowledge of Latin. It is possible that he had an acquaintance with that tongue, but could not speak it with sufficient fluency to make an address in the Roman Senate. If he had some knowledge of it, he could probably follow the remarks of the German as they were being interpreted from Teutonic into Latin.

## CHAPTER XI

### FAILURE OF WRITERS TO CONSIDER DIFFERENCES OF LANGUAGE

Various nations, it appears, have had dealings with one another from a very remote period. In describing the intercourse of divers nations, the authors in many cases are not troubled by the difference of language and so do not explain how the difficulty was overcome. In their mind the important thing is the historical event and not the incidental matter of the interpreters or the linguistic difficulties. Many instances of this sort can be drawn from the classical literatures, but for our purpose it will suffice to quote a few.

After the victory at Arbela,<sup>147</sup> Alexander the Great received embassies from the Carthaginians and other African states, as well as from Spain, Sicily, Gaul, Sardinia, and Italy. We are informed that Pythagoras studied<sup>148</sup> in Egypt and in Babylon, but no mention is made of his studying foreign languages, as is done in the case of Themistocles. The great traveler Herodotus nowhere intimates that he knew the languages of any of the countries that he visited, and yet he only once tells us that he used an interpreter.<sup>149</sup> It is recorded<sup>150</sup> that the great Mithridates, when he was preparing for war against Rome, sent embassies to distant nations: the Cimbri, the Gallograeci, the Sarmatae, and the Bastarnae; but no mention is made of the difficulties attendant upon the use of foreign tongues. Among later examples, Caesar<sup>151</sup> narrates that during the Gallic War he received information about the enemy from captives

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<sup>147</sup> Just. XII, 13, 1.

<sup>148</sup> Just. XX, 4, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Hdt. II, 125.

<sup>150</sup> Just. XXXVIII, 3, 6.

<sup>151</sup> E. g. Caes. *B. G.* I, 22; VII, 44.

and deserters, but he does not take the trouble to tell us how he overcame the difference of language.

In this connexion, it may not be amiss to call attention to the usage of the poets. Persons of different nationalities, speaking various languages, meet and have no difficulty in addressing and understanding one other. Thus Aeneas narrates his adventures to Dido, and the Carthaginian queen has no difficulty in understanding the Trojan. In Italy Aeneas deals with the Italians as though they were akin to him in language. But Vergil has a story which he wishes to tell, and to him the important thing is to narrate it without stopping to explain things which are of minor importance as compared with the spirit of the whole. His ideal was to write a Roman epic, and not a book on linguistic differences and Italic dialects.



## CHAPTER XII

### CONCLUSION

From the survey presented in the preceding chapters, it appears that interpreters were used extensively in antiquity in diplomatic, administrative, commercial, and private affairs. In fact, they were frequently used when they were unnecessary, as in the cases where national pride forbade a man to speak any language but his own. However, it is the most satisfactory thing for a man to talk directly with the person of foreign speech, as was so strikingly expressed by Themistocles, who, with his Oriental imagery, likened a man's discourse to a piece of tapestry.

Even if interpreters are indispensable, they are not always practical instruments. We have seen that they could not be employed when the patience of a mutinous army would be exhausted by hearing the same speech repeated four or five times in different tongues. Furthermore, a resort to them involves confidence in the polyglot's honesty and ability; but Hanno, the Carthaginian, could not always depend on his officers, who sometimes reported his speeches in a contrary sense, either through malice or through their failure to understand. Still this was probably an exceptional case, and on the whole, we may assume that interpreters rendered the languages as faithfully and as honestly as they were able.

It may seem that the references to interpreters are few, considering the prevalence of the institution and the long period represented by the two literatures. But in the historian's mind, the important things are the facts, the causes and the results of movements, and the ideas expressed by men in their speeches. To him the languages used appeared of minor importance, and he probably did not think of the attendant difficulties when he was absorbed in the main purpose of his work.

Only occasionally did he become aware of the difficulties of communication in cases where the use of the interpreter is too prominent to be overlooked. So we should not be surprised that the authors have not referred to linguists more frequently; affairs of everyday knowledge are those least often mentioned in books.

# INDEX OF QUOTATIONS FROM ANCIENT AUTHORS

Aeschylus <i>Agam.</i> 1045, . . . . .	14	Curtius III, 12, 6, . . . . .	41
<i>Agam.</i> 1046-7, . . . . .	12	V, 11, 1 sqq., . . . . .	40
Ammianus Marcellinus XIX, 11, . . . . .		V, 13, 7, . . . . .	20
5, . . . . .	59	VI, 5, 19, . . . . .	41
Appian <i>De Bello Mith.</i> 50, . . . . .	12	VI, 9, 34 sqq., . . . . .	55
III <i>De Rebus Samniticis</i> . . . . .		VI, 11, 4, . . . . .	21
7, . . . . .	47	VII, 10, 4 sqq., . . . . .	42
Aristophanes <i>Acharnians</i> 100 . . . . .		VIII, 12, 9, . . . . .	34
sqq., . . . . .	35	X, 3, 5-6, . . . . .	41
Arrian <i>Anab.</i> IV, 3, . . . . .	42; 43		
VII, 1, . . . . .	34	Digest XXXII, 11, . . . . .	52
Cassius Dio, Zonaras VIII, 24, 8, . . . . .		XLIX, 15, 5, 3, . . . . .	57
in Boissevain, Vol. I, p. 207, . . . . .	50	Diodorus Siculus XI, 57, . . . . .	35
XL, 41, . . . . .	13	XVII, 76, . . . . .	41
LI, 16, . . . . .	58		
LVII, 15 . . . . .	54; 55	Gellius VI, 14, 8 sq., . . . . .	54
LX, 8, . . . . .	55	XVII, 17, . . . . .	16; 18
LXXVIII, 6, . . . . .	53		
Caesar <i>B. G.</i> I, 19, 3, . . . . .	51	Herodotus I, 86, . . . . .	23
I, 22, . . . . .	61	II, 125, . . . . .	30; 61
I, 44, 12, . . . . .	51	II, 154, . . . . .	19
I, 47, 4, . . . . .	51	II, 164, . . . . .	19
IV, 20, 4, . . . . .	52	III, 19, . . . . .	24
V, 36, 1, . . . . .	51	III, 38, . . . . .	33
VII, 44, . . . . .	61	III, 139-140, . . . . .	35
Cicero <i>Ad fam.</i> XIII, 54, . . . . .	21	IV, 24, . . . . .	21
<i>Ad Att.</i> I, 12, 2, . . . . .	21	IV, 78, . . . . .	17
XVI, 11, 7, . . . . .	21	IV, 87, . . . . .	36
<i>Balb.</i> 11, 28, . . . . .	47	IV, 111, . . . . .	14
<i>De div.</i> II, 64, 131, . . . . .	54	IV, 113, . . . . .	14
<i>De fin.</i> V, 29, 89, . . . . .	54	IV, 196, . . . . .	14
<i>Tusc.</i> V, 40, 116, . . . . .	9		
<i>Vatin.</i> 15, 35, . . . . .	21	Josephus <i>Antiq. Jud.</i> I, 4, 3, . . . . .	9
<i>Verr.</i> II, 11, 22, 54, . . . . .	56	XVIII, 6, . . . . .	
II, 111, 37, 84, . . . . .	56	7, . . . . .	59
II, 14, 22, 49, . . . . .	56	XX, 11 (9), . . . . .	
II, 14, 26, 58, . . . . .	56	2, . . . . .	32
Claudian <i>Epig.</i> I, 19-20, . . . . .	52		



<i>Bell. Ind.</i> V, 9, 2, . . . . .	32	Plutarch <i>Moralia, Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata</i> 185,	
VI, 2, 1, . . . . .	32	<i>Them.</i> 15-16, . . . . .	35
VI, 2, 5, . . . . .	33	<i>Vitae</i>	
VI, 6, 2, . . . . .	33	<i>Alex.</i> 37, . . . . .	17
<i>Contra Apionem</i> I, 9, . . . . .	32	47, 3, . . . . .	17
Justinus XII, 13, 1, . . . . .	61	<i>Anton.</i> 27, . . . . .	16
XX, 4, 3, . . . . .	61	46, 2, . . . . .	31
XX, 5, 11-13, . . . . .	30	48, 1, . . . . .	31
XXXVIII, 3, 6, . . . . .	61	<i>Cato Maior</i> 12, . . . . .	47
		22, . . . . .	54
Livy I, 1, . . . . .	11	<i>Crassus</i> 33, . . . . .	48
I, 18, . . . . .	11	<i>Fab. Max.</i> 6, 1, . . . . .	50
X, 4, . . . . .	49	<i>Sertorius</i> 14, 2, . . . . .	18
XXII, 13, . . . . .	50	<i>Sulla</i> 27, 2, . . . . .	21
XXIII, 5, 11, . . . . .	25	<i>Them.</i> 6, 3, . . . . .	35
XXVII, 43, 5, . . . . .	50	28, 1 sqq., . . . . .	35
XXX, 30, . . . . .	50	29, 1-3, . . . . .	35
XXX, 33, . . . . .	28	Polybius	
XXX, 34, . . . . .	28	I, 67, . . . . .	24
XLV, 8, 6, . . . . .	57	I, 69-70, . . . . .	25
XLV, 29, . . . . .	58	I, 80, . . . . .	26; 27
Lucan <i>Phars.</i> VIII, 348-9, . . . . .	13	III, 44, . . . . .	29
Lucian <i>De Sal.</i> 64, . . . . .	14	V, 83, . . . . .	44
		XI, 19, . . . . .	25; 28
Nepos <i>Hann.</i> 13, 2, . . . . .	31; 50	XV, 6, . . . . .	50
<i>Them.</i> 10, . . . . .	35	XV, II, . . . . .	28
New Testament I <i>Cor.</i> XIV,		XV, 12, . . . . .	28
7-11, . . . . .	10	XXIX, 20, . . . . .	57
<i>Acts</i> II,		Pseudo-Aurelius Victor <i>Vir. ill.</i>	
I-II, . . . . .	10	LXXVI, 1, . . . . .	16
Old Testament <i>Gen.</i> XI, 6-9, . . . . .	9	Quintilian <i>Inst.</i> XI, 3, 85-7, . . . . .	13
XLII, 20 sqq., . . . . .	23	Sallust <i>Iug.</i> 18, . . . . .	11
Ovid <i>Pont.</i> III, 2, 40, . . . . .	19	109, 4, . . . . .	51
IV, 13, 17 sqq., . . . . .	19	Strabo II, 3, 4, C 98, . . . . .	34
IV, 14, 39 sqq., . . . . .	25	XII, 4, 12, C 629, . . . . .	56
<i>Trist.</i> V, 10, 37 sqq., . . . . .	10	XV, 1, 64, C 716, . . . . .	34
V, 12, 58-59, . . . . .	19	Suetonius <i>Nero</i> 13, . . . . .	48
		<i>Tib.</i> 71, . . . . .	54; 55
Pliny <i>N. H.</i> VI, 5, 5, §15, . . . . .	22	Tacitus <i>Ann.</i> II, 10, . . . . .	52
VI, 22, 24, §84-5, . . . . .	53	II, 60, . . . . .	30
VI, 22, 24, §88, . . . . .	15	II, 62, . . . . .	19
VII, 1, 1, §7, . . . . .	9	Thucydides I, 137-138, . . . . .	35
VII, 24, §24, §88, . . . . .	16	IV, 50, . . . . .	36
XXV, 2, 3, §6, . . . . .	16		

Valerius Maximus	II, 2, 2, . . . .	56	II, 5, 35, . . . 20; 46	
	II, 2, 3, . . . .	55	IV, 2, 18, . . . .	39
	VIII, 7, 16, . .	16	IV, 4, 5, . . . .	39
	VIII, 7, Ext.		IV, 5, 10, . . . .	40
	15, . . . . .	35	IV, 5, 33-34 . .	40
	IX, 5, Ext.		IV, 8, 4, . . . .	18
	3, . . . . .	21	IV, 8, 4 sqq., .	43
			V, 4, 4, . . . .	44
Xenophon <i>Anab.</i>	I, 2, 17, . . . .	37	VII, 2, 19, . . .	44
	I, 4, 16, . . . .	37	VII, 3, 24-25, .	45
	I, 6, 4 sqq., . .	37	VII, 6, 8, . . . .	45
	I, 7, 2, . . . . .	37	VII, 6, 43, . . .	45
	I, 8, 1, . . . . .	38	<i>Cyr.</i> I, 1, 4, . . . .	20
	I, 8, 12, . . . .	37	V, 4, 51, . . . .	24
	II, 1, 7 sqq., . .	38	VII, 5, 31, . . .	24
	II, 3, 17, . . . .	38	VIII, 3, 24-25, .	24
	II, 5, 1 sqq., . .	39	<i>Mem.</i> IV, 4, 19, . . .	11









